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an  
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Heroes

TRUE STORIES OF SOVIET FIGHTING MEN

*Translated from the Russian*  
*by*  
ELIZABETH DONNELLY



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THIS book is a collection of sketches dealing with some of the most important events of the war in 1943, with the heroism of the Soviet fighting man both in defence and in attack, in the course of which the Red Army has driven the German invaders from Moscow, Stalingrad, Leningrad and the Donbas to the Dnieper, the Desna, the Pruth and the Soviet border itself.

Every act of heroism described in this book is an authentic fact and the characters are actual people. We have attempted herein to depict the variegated facets of the war and the single desire on the part of all the people of the Soviet Union to drive the fascist aggressors from our territory.

"The Red Army's successes became possible owing to the correct strategy and tactics pursued by the Soviet Command, to the high morale and the *élan* of our men and commanders, to the fact that our troops have been well supplied with first-class Soviet war materiel, and to the enhanced skill and training of our artillerymen, mortar gunners, tankmen, airmen, signals, sappers, infantrymen, cavalrymen and scouts." (*Stalin.*) It is our aim to show in this book what these heroes are really like and how they are making possible the successes of the Red Army.

Moscow, 1944



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GEORGE BEREZKO

## THE RED ROCKET

1



AT 17:30 Lieutenant Gorbunov launched his attack, and in accordance with his orders broke through to the eastern outskirts of the village. One unit of his men occupied the ice-coated trenches abandoned by the Germans. Gorbunov himself dashed into the dark school building, firing as he ran. The spurts of flame lit up a deserted, brick-littered room. Gorbunov stopped short and ceased firing. Behind him he heard the tramping feet and heavy breathing of the victors. His men occupied room after room, smashing the doors open with their rifle butts. Gradually, the shouts of "Hurrah!" died down and in a high-pitched, cracked voice the Lieutenant gave the order to send up three white rockets. Such was the signal that had been agreed upon in the event of success. The rockets soared into the sky, and now it was Gorbunov's turn to wait for a signal. He was expecting a red rocket in a southwesterly direction to inform him that the general offensive had begun. Gorbunov was to support the attack of the main assaulting group and then join with it to wipe out the enemy. His orders were brief and to the point, as all good orders are.

The men settled down in the school building. They reloaded their rifles, jabbering away and eating snow to allay the tremendous fever of excitement that parched their throats. Impelled by a formidable force of bitterness and fury, they had only just run across the icy traverse, lit up by dazzling flashes of automatic-rifle fire. This force, born of the will to live, wiped out all fear of death and was now still seeking an outlet. The whites of the men's eyes glistened in their blackened, frost-seared faces. Steam issued in clouds from their open mouths and wreathed over their heads.

Gorbunov stood in the middle of the classroom and shouted out his orders. Through a big, oval shell hole in the wall the hazy moonlit sky could be seen. Golden glow-worms of tracer bullets were creeping through the bluish air. Gorbunov walked over to the breach and flattening himself

against the wall looked out. Some hundred and fifty metres in front of him, on the high bank of the gully that separated the village from the school, were the Germans. They had taken cover in the dark, snowbound little houses. On the potato-strewn floors of the cellars they had set up heavy machine guns. Their invisible muzzles were pointing straight at the school and the trenches.

Behind the houses, the snowbound woods gleamed faintly like a fallen cloud. There, far in its depths, the lightning of the main blow was due to flash forth, but so far the woods were silent and impenetrable. From time to time flares rose over the forward fringe of the enemy defences. The dead light flooded the gully and at the bottom Gorbunov could see plainly an ice-covered well, paths trampled in the snow and corpses that looked as formless as ink blots. Far off on the horizon a village was burning, and yellow almost motionless flames glowed in the frozen depths of the January night.

Gorbunov wiped his face. He felt an icicle on his face and tore it off. A slight pain shot through his cheek. Evidently it had been grazed by a bullet during the attack, but he had not been aware of it. Scooping up some snow from the bricks, he held it against his face. The snow melted quickly. The Lieutenant looked at his hand, which was stained with a dark moisture, and it occurred to him that he should put a dressing on his cheek, but he forgot about it the next moment.

"Where's the Lieutenant?" shouted a hoarse voice through the darkness.

Gorbunov recognized Medvedovsky, commander of the second sub-division.

"What's up now?" shouted back the Lieutenant. And only then did he realize that he had been shouting all the time, although there was no longer any need to do so.

"Comrade Lieutenant, the men are asking why the Germans are warming themselves in the houses while we're hanging around in the frost?"

"Have you dug in?" asked the Lieutenant quietly, restraining himself.

"We have!" shouted Medvedovsky.

"Why are you shouting?" asked Gorbunov.

"I'm not shouting!" shouted Medvedovsky.

"You've dug in, and that's that!" said Gorbunov.

He felt hot and unfastened the strap under his chin, raising his earlaps. The amazing sensation of rage and intrepid daring that had gripped him had not yet evaporated. For a second the mad idea flashed through his head of not waiting for the signal but dashing ahead with his men and capturing the village without any outside help whatever. He felt the reckless venturesomeness of the lucky gambler who doubles his stakes. But orders were orders, and a frontal assault on a fortified position with the small forces that he had at his command would have been suicidal.

"Keep a sharp look-out," he said. "In my opinion we'll be warming ourselves up before dawn."

The men had crowded together in one corner. Their camouflage coveralls gleamed white. After the energy-draining tenseness of the attack,

the men wanted to eat and smoke. They were crunching hardtack, and their cigarette ends glowed in the darkness.

"He made a dash at me," Lugovikh, a broad-faced, bearded farmer from beyond the Urals was shouting, "but he was so scared his gun was fluttering like a fan. Well, I didn't do any waiting. . . ."

Dvoyeglazov's voice cut in:

"I says to him nice and polite: 'Surrender, you bastard!' and he goes reaching for a grenade. 'Just as you like,' says I, and. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders, without finishing what he was saying.

"Did you let him have it?" asked Lugovikh.

"If the enemy doesn't surrender, he's got to be bumped off," said Dvoyeglazov loudly.

"You said it!" shouted Kochesov, a burly, broad-shouldered teamster from Baku. "That's what I do myself." He was breathing noisily, rolling his round eyes slowly, just as if he were drunk.

The men kept interrupting one another with accounts of the recent engagement in which they had been so successful. They were in high spirits. It was good to be alive, and good to have seen the enemy fleeing before them. The fact that they were together now afforded them unconcealed pleasure. The danger they had experienced in common and the victory they had won in common cancelled whatever the men might not have liked in their mates under other circumstances. Flushed with excitement they bickered and poked fun at one another like people in love.

"Sergeant Rumyantsev!" yelled Gorbunov.

The Sergeant jumped up behind him, and when the Lieutenant turned round he saw a swarthy, snub-nosed face with narrow laughing eyes.

"Thanks, Sergeant," said Gorbunov. "They didn't get you, I see."

"Hale and hearty!" replied Rumyantsev cheerily.

Smiling Gorbunov gazed at the Sergeant. He felt vaguely grateful to him. It was Sergeant Rumyantsev who had first reached the machine-gun nest, flung a grenade into it, and when those of the Germans who had remained alive had taken to their heels, shouted in a voice that could be heard all over the field:

"Come on, mates! We've got the Fritzes sewn up tight!"

"Hale and hearty!" repeated Gorbunov approvingly, just as if this circumstance was the Sergeant's most important personal service. "Good boy!"

Rumyantsev had always liked his commander. But just then he was particularly glad to see the Lieutenant's young profile with the high cheekbones, big nose and thin lips. In this thing that they had accomplished together at such great hazard, the life of each had depended not only on personal skill or luck, but also on how everyone else had acted. After the successful engagement, Rumyantsev felt a boundless faith in the Lieutenant. To a certain extent he attributed his own personal success to the skilful operation of the commander.

There was an awkward pause, during which he was at a loss for words to express his admiration for the man with whom he was talking.

"Hale and hearty," he repeated once more, with just a hint of indebtedness in his voice.

The Lieutenant ordered one of the junior commanders to watch out for the red rocket that was due to appear in the southwest. Taking Rummyantsev with him, he set out to examine the premises. At the door they bumped into Masha Ryzhova.

"Hello, Comrade Lieutenant!" said Masha in her high-pitched, baby voice. "What's new?"

"Nothing much," said Gorbunov.

"I had a job getting to you all right," said Masha.

"She always gets through!" exclaimed Rummyantsev.

The girl sighed deeply, took off her cap and ran her fingers through her tangled hair. In the pale light of the moon her round face with the full lips and deep-set, blue-shadowed eyes looked incredibly beautiful to Gorbunov. Like everyone in the unit he was proud of their medical officer. But Masha was a girl, and Gorbunov felt that he could ask her a question that he would never have asked a man.

"Didn't you find it terrifying getting here?" he asked solicitously.

"Everyone asks the same thing," said Masha. "There's plenty of space round about, and I don't think I take up so terribly much room in it. Why would a bullet pick out just me to hit?"

"A bullet's got no sense," jested Gorbunov.

"That's a fact," agreed Rummyantsev.

"I only made three dressings," said Masha. "That's all the casualties there were."

"How's Ivanovsky?" asked Gorbunov.

"He'll pull through," replied Masha.

"He's had tough luck, poor chap," remarked Gorbunov.

Ivanovsky, Political Officer and his second in command, had been wounded at the beginning of the operation.

"I'm simply roasting," complained Masha.

"Rest up a bit," said Gorbunov. "We're going to take a look round."

Gorbunov and Rummyantsev went up the stone staircase with the smashed bannisters to the second floor. The room they entered had evidently been the school library. Piles of books covered with snow that had drifted in through the windows lay in the corners. Torn pages made pale blurs on the dark floor. Gorbunov bent down and picked up one of the books.

"Gogol, *Taras Bulba*," he read on the title page. Then he picked up another book. "Jules Verne, *Eighty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*."

"Good book," said Rummyantsev taking the book from the Lieutenant. Wiping the hoar-frost from the cover with his sleeve, he put the book on the shelf.

Two Red Army men were setting up a machine gun in the moonlit window embrasure. Its long barrel was white with frost. Gorbunov said a few words to the men and walked on.

In the next room mounted drawings made by the pupils were still hanging on the walls. Aeroplanes of amazing construction flew across the small



sheets of paper, while flowers turned their symmetrical petals to the observer. People with turned-out toes stood near ornate little cottages, and a sun as prickly as a porcupine beamed down on them from a cloudless sky. Frost had formed along the folds of the paper and covered the torn edges of the cardboard.

"Exactly like my Lena's," remarked Rumyantsev. "My little girl's a great artist too."

"They certainly know how to draw!" said Gorbunov admiringly.

He was twenty-four years old and single. But in front of these drawings on which the names of the artists had been written in the most varied hand-writings, the Lieutenant felt at least like the elder brother if not the father of these children. He praised this name or that like a close relative, and like one of the family he was glad that it was he and his men who had returned her school to Nina Volkova. The Germans had driven the children out of here, wrecked the library and filthied the schoolrooms. In driving out the Germans, the Lieutenant had been furthering a holy cause. He had restored justice.

This thought had come after the fighting, as a reward for what they had gone through. During the fighting itself, amidst the thunder of bursting metal, the sweetish smoke of gunpowder, the tense action, only what was taking place around him had seemed of importance. But when the firing died down, all that had been forgotten surged back into his memory, returning anew as it were together with life that had once again been preserved. Gorbunov recalled that by profession he was a meteorologist and had graduated the Institute shortly before the war, that his mother was living in Saratov, that his sister was married and his brother in the army. He grieved for his comrades who had fallen in battle. Then he asked whether the runner had come back, became aware of the fact that he was hungry and sent someone to find out when dinner would be brought up. A sense of stern pride filled him as he realized the grandeur and justice of the struggle in which he was taking part. And this pride gave birth to a confidence and calm beyond the ken of those who had not stood like him face to face with the enemy, feeling that his country was behind him.

Like all servicemen the Lieutenant did not think much of the men who had remained in the rear, although he admitted the importance of what they were doing. But sometimes he thought of them with pity. These men never felt the joy that Gorbunov was now feeling as he gazed at the school-children's drawings. It seemed to him that the whole meaning of the attack that had just ended opened up to him in the astonishing flowers drawn by Nina Volkova.

Gorbunov stared at the drawings for a few seconds more, then walked off rapidly, as if drawn by some magic power. He was walking amidst his country's possessions that had been wrested from marauders in battle. He had fought for the weak, had defended Gogol and Jules Verne. And Nina Volkova, who would return here on the heels of his men. He was bringing back happiness.

He made the rounds of the remaining classrooms, went through the corridor, which was crowded with desks, and entered a room with bare

shelves running around the walls. On the threshold he kicked a cylindrical German gas mask so that it crashed into the opposite wall. Empty meat cans glistened on the straw-littered floor. The door to the end room was locked and he had to force it open.

Moonlight filled the room with its wan glow. Directly opposite the door, his back pressed to the wall, stood a tall, bearded man in a black jacket. His head was bent to one side as his glittering, terrified eyes stared at the newcomer.

Gorbunov all but shouted: "What are you doing here?" But he stopped short and his jaw set in a hard line. The man's bare feet did not reach the floor. In one outstretched hand was a framed photograph, evidently torn from the wall in search of support during his last death agonies. A thin electric cord extended from his neck to the ceiling. There were no panes in the windows, and snow lay on the disordered bed, on the table and on the shoulders of the hanged man.

Rumyantsev helped him take down the heavy, rigid body and place it on the bed.

"The teacher, most likely. . . ." he murmured.

"Yes," said Gorbunov curtly.

Suddenly the room was flooded with light. The greenish flame of a German flare was illuminating the room. The bulging glazed eyes of the dead man flashed as if life had flared up in them again for a moment.

In the wooden frame with which the teacher had been so loath to part was the photograph of a little girl in hair ribbons.

"Swine!" muttered Rumyantsev.

They left the room and went downstairs in silence.

"Must have been his granddaughter," remarked Rumyantsev at last.

Gorbunov pictured to himself the hand of the elderly teacher groping and scraping along the wall in a vain endeavour to keep his body from falling into death.

"Perhaps," he replied shortly.

He found it hard to talk about the tormented old man. In the recent encounter, Gorbunov had shot a German, and it gave him some relief to remember this.

He walked over to the observer whom he had left at the breach in the wall. For some reason or other, Gorbunov felt that the order for the attack would be given at that moment. He thirsted for immediate and complete vengeance.

"There's been no red rocket, Comrade Lieutenant," reported the observer.

"Are you sure?" asked Gorbunov.

And both of them stared into the southwest, into the distant snowbound woods, which lay there as dark and mysterious as a thundercloud.

Gorbunov had been on active service long enough not to be surprised at unforeseen obstacles that frequently changed a good operational plan in the course of its execution. The most ingenious imagination, it seemed, was obviously powerless to foresee all the combinations of chance: a counter-manceuvre on the part of the enemy, a sudden change in the weather, lack of decisiveness on the part of those who had to carry out the plan, or, on the contrary, unwarranted initiative. Each of these circumstances in its turn influenced the conglomeration of events, and the number of changes in the original plan mounted alarmingly, threatening to leave nothing of the original. Gorbunov knew all this, but that did not make his task any the easier. Still less did this knowledge console him, because he had seen good plans carried out successfully more than once. He had no inkling of the reason for the hitch in launching the general offensive and therefore found no justification for this delay that was making his own position so much the more hazardous.

Quite some time had passed since he and his men had occupied the outskirts of the village, but the flanking groups had still not begun their drive. The enforced delay deprived Gorbunov of the obvious advantages afforded by his initial success. The time thus granted the enemy to prepare their resistance was simultaneously eating up the driving force of his men.

"They don't feel anything now except exhausture, cold and perplexity," thought Gorbunov.

He began to worry about whether he and his handful of men would be able to hold out here if the Germans counter-attacked. He had just made the round of the trenches. His orders as to how best to fortify themselves in the trenches were explicit and to the point, but still he did not feel easy. The Germans in the centre of the village, on the high cliff, were in a position to wipe out the whole of the first line they had abandoned. Gorbunov realized that his men were just as much aware of this as he, and although they said nothing he knew that they sized up the situation soberly.

The frost was making itself felt more and more keenly. Gorbunov put down his earlaps and fastened them under his chin. On the school porch he looked once more in the direction from which the red rocket should have appeared. In the icy blue waste of the sky the disk of the moon shone through a light mist. The village on the horizon was still burning. But in the dim moonlit-drenched fields blanketed with bluish snow, even the flames seemed frozen and static.

Gorbunov went back into the school building. The men were dozing or sitting against the walls in silence, their shoulders hunched, trying to move as little as possible so as to retain the warmth that was fast leaving them. They were as solicitous of it as of some fragile precious object that a careless movement would shatter.

Gorbunov sat down so that he could keep his eyes fixed on the sky through the breach in the wall that looked as if the edges had been gnawed away. The two runners whom he had sent with a report had still not returned, and in his mind he hauled them over the coals. He thought of Captain Pod-

laskin, commander of the flanking group, and clenched his fist indignantly in its fur mitten. He was furious.

Stretching out his legs, he suddenly felt that he was tired. He did not want to sleep, but his body, which until now had not made itself felt, suddenly refused to obey him, overpowered by weakness. He was frozen through and famished. With an effort he took a rye crust out of the pocket of his wadded trousers and broke it.

"Hungry, Masha?" he asked.

"What a question!" bantered Masha.

She moved over to him and took the piece of crust he offered her. They sat shoulder to shoulder, gnawing at the bread, which was hard as iron.

A hundred and fifty metres from them was the enemy. From time to time orange streamers of tracer bullets streaked across the bit of sky peeping through the hole in the wall. Someone moaned in his sleep, and in one corner someone coughed.

Gorbunov and Masha crunched away at their crusts. The Lieutenant glanced at the girl out of the corners of his eyes. He could see her round cheek, her saucily tilted nose and her frost-covered hair tumbling out from under her cap. Her cheek moved as she chewed. In the shadow cast by her long lashes he could see a big eye shining. He put his hand in his pocket again and took out a lump of sugar wrapped in a bit of paper. Masha nibbled the sugar, her face calm and thoughtful.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could eat once and not have to bother again about eating for a whole week!" she said. "This way when there's nothing to do you want to eat every day. . . ."

"That's how it is," said Gorbunov. "Man is an imperfect creature."

The sugar had been eaten up, but they continued to sit side by side.

"How nice it would be to have a glass of soda water with syrup now. . . . In Moscow there wasn't a day I didn't drink soda water," said Masha.

"After the war I'll treat you to champagne," said Gorbunov gallantly.

"No, I like *Kagor* wine better," said Masha.

For some time they sat in silence. Suddenly Gorbunov felt Masha's head resting against his shoulder. Looking down he saw that she had fallen asleep. She was breathing evenly and quietly. At first he felt a certain awkwardness, but immediately reassured himself with the thought that at the front relations between commander and subordinates were somehow much closer. It seemed to him that it was a friendly desire on his part to make easier the life of the young woman who was voluntarily and without complaint sharing the hard lot of the soldiers. His back ached, but he did not change his position in order not to disturb her.

He glanced through the breach: no red rocket. That same instant he heard a muffled shot and a constantly increasing rattle. A white flame flashed in the breach. An explosion roared, and splinters began to whine.

"Oh, and I fell asleep!" exclaimed Masha putting her cap to rights.

Mortar bombs were bursting one after the other. In the breach the sky flared up as if it had caught fire. Brick dust filled the air. The men crawled out of range of the hole in the wall and huddled in the dark corners, as if the gloom could shelter them from the firing.

Gorbunov crawled over to the breach and looked out cautiously. Bombs were bursting all along the line of the trenches. The snow raised by the explosions whirled around the school building. The lines of dark houses on the cliff were lighted up constantly by the spurts of gunfire. Gorbunov gripped his Tommy gun.

"Rumyantsev! Sveshnikov, Petrenko!" he shouted.

At any moment the Germans might break through. Gorbunov placed his men, giving them orders to keep on their toes. He himself dashed upstairs to the machine gun, bending low. He no longer felt tired or cold. The tremendous responsibility, the need to foresee everything and arrange for everything left him no time to think about himself. Once again he was fully occupied, and all that threatened him personally, splinters or a chance bullet, seemed to him only a regrettable obstacle.

"Did you spot their battery?" shouted Gorbunov to the machine-gunners. "Why didn't you?"

There was a roar under their feet. A couple of floor boards flew up, bristling with nails, torn up by invisible hands.

"A bull's eye," flashed through Gorbunov's brain, but he had no time to react to this occurrence.

"There it is!" he shouted to the machine-gunners. "Behind the third house on the right. . . ."

Between the houses on the edge of the cliff a powerful intermittent flame was flickering. In the light of the white flashes the black lace of a bare winter orchard, the corner of a house and fretted window frames emerged from the inky blackness for a second.

"Open fire at the orchard!" cried the Lieutenant.

Running over to the other window, he knelt down and emptied his Tommy gun. Then he turned and shouted over the racket of the machine gun:

"Change your position!"

The machine-gunners ran into the kitchen. Gorbunov smashed the board that had been nailed over the window and the men thrust the muzzle of their gun through it. They fired a long burst, and a cloud of grey steam rose from the machine gun. The flashes between the houses disappeared, and did not reappear. A comparative silence fell.

"And is that all?" asked the No. 1, glancing at the Lieutenant.

"Good work!" said Gorbunov.

He remembered the bomb that had landed on the first floor and ran downstairs.

On his way down, he thought to himself that had he waited to leave the room a minute longer he would most likely never have left alive. Such things had happened to him before, just as they do to everyone who has been under fire. The idea that he had escaped being killed or wounded amazed him, and he felt a belated anxiety.

All was dark in the room below. Snow blew from the straw and bricks. Gorbunov caught sight of Masha. She was sitting against the wall and raised an embarrassed face to him as he came in, as if she had been expecting him.

"What's the matter with you, Ryzhova?" asked Gorbunov.

"Oh, Comrade Lieutenant," murmured the girl in a low, ashamed voice, "I've been wounded."

She sounded as if she were not convinced of this herself. She was looking up at Gorbunov as if with his arrival everything would be cleared up and be just as it had been only a few minutes ago.

Gorbunov and Rumyantsev carried the girl into the next room. They put her down on the straw, and Rumyantsev went out to give orders for the other wounded men to be brought in.

"Where did it get you, Masha?" asked Gorbunov.

"Here," said the girl, but made no move to show him the wound. Her face had become drawn and pale, but the expression of guilty surprise had not left it.

Gorbunov untied the tapes of Masha's camouflage coverall. A splinter had pierced the sheepskin jacket on the right side of her breast. Carefully Gorbunov unfastened the hooks. He smelled the warm, subtle odour of blood. The girl's tunic was drenched and steaming. The metal cap of a pencil was sticking out of her torn right pocket.

"Let me do it myself," gasped Masha. "You don't know how."

Gorbunov saw that Masha was smiling. She made a move and cried out.

"Lie still, Masha, lie still," said Rumyantsev loudly.

He had come back with Masha's first-aid kit in his hands. Taking out a pair of scissors, he deftly cut away the tunic. He worked confidently, as if he had been dressing wounds all his life and this was his regular occupation. Seemingly he was not in the least affected by the feeling of helpless pity that Gorbunov was experiencing so keenly.

Turning on his heel abruptly, the Lieutenant left the room and went over to the breach. The man on duty there silently moved aside. Gorbunov stared at him gloomily, but said nothing. No red rocket had appeared in the southwest.

The Germans had ceased fire, but at any moment it might be renewed.

"I won't be able to hold out here," thought Gorbunov. "We'll be killed off one by one and all for nothing."

The unit commanders came to him with reports of casualties. Three men had been killed and five wounded, two seriously. On hearing the names of the men he knew so well, Gorbunov turned aside. The commanders were silent, their eyes fixed on him expectantly.

"Bring the wounded men here," said Gorbunov.

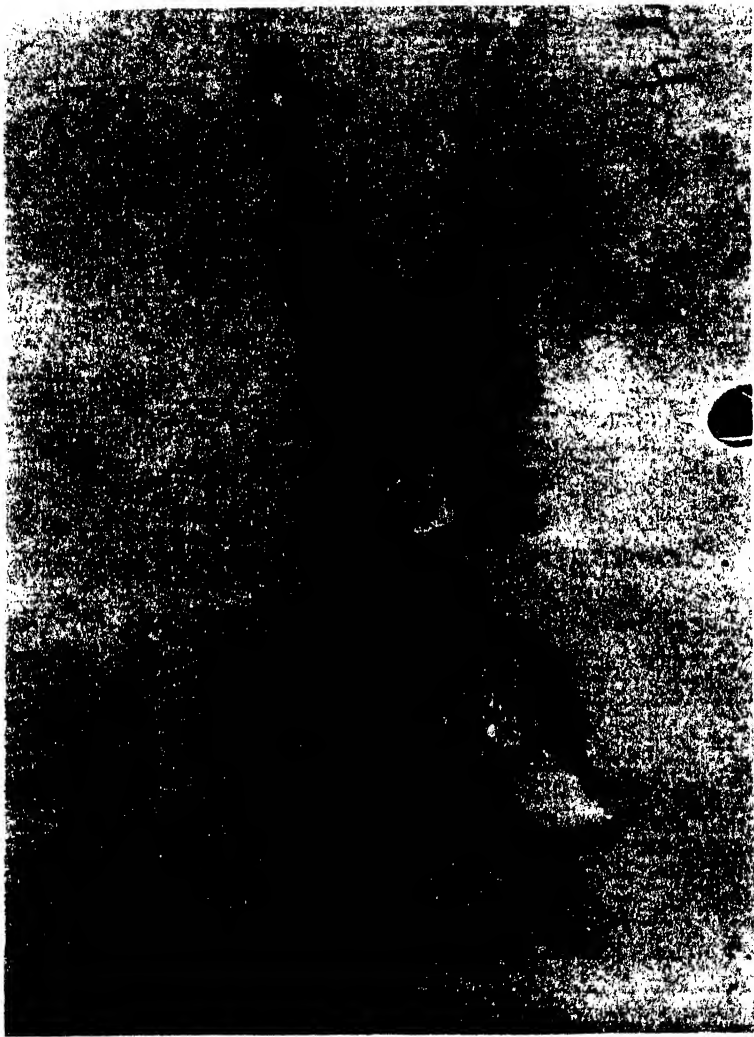
He looked slowly and moodily from face to face. Medvedovsky asked softly:

"What are we to do now, Comrade Lieutenant?"

"Remain where we are!" said Gorbunov in a hard voice. "If the Fritzes show up—wipe them out!"

Medvedovsky repeated the order. His face was a mask, and it was hard to say whether he approved of the commander's decision or was merely submitting to his orders.

Gorbunov understood the feelings of his men. Every extra minute of passive waiting here threatened new losses, the need for which they were not convinced of. They had no idea of the reasons for the delay in their advance



SNIPER

*Pencil Drawing by Fedor Modorov*



**THE COMMANDER**

*Pencil Drawing by Nikolai Zhukov*



and were therefore prepared to believe that there were none. Gorbunov could not convince them of the contrary, as he himself put it down to incapability or indecision on the part of the men with whom the operational plan linked him. He did not risk advancing himself because his orders were to attack in coordination with the flanking group. Moreover he lacked sufficient forces to attack on his own. As for withdrawing, that he could not do because the signal for the joint attack might be given at any moment, in which case his retreat from the captured zone would be a crime. At the same time it was evident that he could not remain where he was, and this was clear to every man in his detachment.

The commanders left. The Lieutenant reloaded his tommy gun and slung it round his shoulder again.

"Something is bound to turn up," he thought, trying to reassure himself. "Some way out can always be found at the last moment. If Podlaskin does not begin the attack, my runners will come back. . . . Besides the Colonel could not have forgotten about us. . . ."

Just then Gorbunov saw one of his runners. Covered with snow, Private Mitkin was standing in the doorway and looking round the room. His eyebrows, lashes and unshaven cheeks were coated with frost. Restraining himself, Gorbunov waited for him to come up. But hardly had the runner begun to report than Gorbunov realized that what he had feared most had happened. He lowered his eyes as he listened to the hasty, mumbled report.

"So the Germans are in the grove?" he asked quietly.

"In the grove, Comrade Lieutenant. They opened fire on us and we made a detour and dived into the ravine. . . . But we couldn't get through there either. Then Fedunin says to me: 'Run back to the Lieutenant and tell him how things stand. Meanwhile I'll try to get through. Maybe I'll make it and maybe I won't. But anyhow you just tell the Lieutenant that we're surrounded'. . . ."

"Fedunin could never say a thing like that," said Gorbunov.

The runner was silent. His swarthy face with the white eyebrows was strained as the face of a man who has been given a task that is beyond his powers.

"That's nonsense! I know Fedunin. It's not the Fritzes who'll surround us, but we who'll surround the Fritzes. Understand?"

"I understand," said Mitkin uncertainly.

"Well, why do you say such things then?"

Mechanically Mitkin pulled the mittens off his frozen hands and folding them together as if in prayer began to breathe on them.

"He's dead beat, poor chap," thought the Lieutenant. On Mitkin's face he saw open and wistful perplexity. Suddenly Mitkin laughed understandingly.

"I understand," he repeated. To himself he thought: "Being sly. Worrying about our morale. . . . But why should he try that stunt on us? After all we're his right hand men in an emergency." But he did not say this out loud to the Lieutenant. And although both of them understood the situation in which the detachment found itself, they pretended that all was well.

"You must go back at once, you know the way," said Gorbunov. He was sorry to have to send the exhausted Red Armyman out again and therefore he spoke sternly. "I'll send another man with you. You must get to HQ at all costs. . . . Crawl there on one arm if you have to. . . ."

When Gorbunov had left to assign another man, Mitkin walked over to Dvoyeglazov.

"Roll me a fag, pal," he asked. "I can't do it myself, my fingers are frozen."

"Got us squeezed in?" asked Dvoyeglazov warily as he handed him a cigarette.

"Hell, no!" replied Mitkin. "We'll get round them somehow!"

Walking over to a corner he lit up and inhaled greedily and deeply. Then, together with his new partner, he stood in front of the Lieutenant, receiving his orders.

"Report orally," said Gorbunov. "We've dug in on the eastern edge of the village. The enemy is preparing a counter-attack, which may begin at any minute. On the way try to ascertain more exactly how many Germans are in the grove. Report about that too. . . ."

He was silent for a moment.

"If you don't carry out this mission, don't return."

He walked over to the wall and began to stare through the breach again. So the Germans had managed to cut off his communications with the rear.

"I have to think it all out calmly," he repeated to himself several times. But actually the situation in which he found himself did not require much thinking. Like every hopeless situation, it was amazingly clear.

"What do you say, let's go," said Mitkin.

At the door he suddenly turned back and hurried over to Dvoyeglazov.

"You know my address, chum," he whispered quickly. "In case of anything write my wife that I fell at my post. You write just like that: he fell at his post. Will you remember? . . ."

"I will," said Dvoyeglazov.

"Well, so long!" said Mitkin. He stamped out his cigarette butt impatiently and hurried out.

### 3

Masha was becoming weaker and weaker, but she paid no attention to this. What grieved her most of all was that she had dropped out of the ranks at what seemed to her a most inopportune moment. She felt guilty before Rumyantsev, who was now fussing around the wounded in her stead. Gasping hoarsely she tried to rise to her feet, enraged at her weakness. She chattered incessantly. She spoke to the wounded and comforted them. She advised the Sergeant on how best to make a dressing so as to cause the least pain. When requested to lie quietly she made no reply.

"You have to have a special approach to each one of them, you know, Rumyantsev. . . . Some of the wounded men are just passive and these lose heart right away. . . . Others are just bursting with energy and they don't let you do anything with them. . . . Some of them groan

and some don't utter a sound. . . . And you have to treat each one of them differently."

"And are there any who do as you say?" asked Rumyantsev.

"There are, those who've been shell-shocked. . . ." said Masha.

Rumyantsev nailed up the window with boards from a cupboard and gave orders to stuff up the cracks with straw. Accompanied by a private with a flashlight, the Sergeant passed from one wounded man to another.

"A hundred gramms, brother. To your good health!" he said, getting down on his knees and holding out the first-aid flask with vodka. "I'd drink some myself, only I'm not supposed to. . . ."

The narrow ray of the flashlight lit up his small eyebrowless face with the deep-set intelligent eyes. He was all spattered with blood and even his face was smeared, because he kept wiping it with his hands.

"All in order," he declared when he had finished a dressing and covered the wounded man with his sheepskin.

If anyone began shouting or tried to break away, Masha would come to the Sergeant's assistance.

"Come now, have a little patience, you can stand it. . . . Goodness, what a namby-pamby!" Masha's breath came short and her voice kept breaking. "You better think what it'll be like after the war's over. . . . We'll have a great life then."

When all five men were made comfortable, Rumyantsev wiped his hands on the edge of his smock and took out his tobacco pouch.

"And now I can light up," he said.

Masha called to him and asked for a drink. She had been wanting a drink for a long time, but had waited patiently till Rumyantsev would be free. The Sergeant brought her some snow in his billy can and Masha swallowed the light cold snowflakes with pleasure.

"Better than lemonade," she said with a smile.

Rumyantsev sat down beside her and lit his cigarette.

"What a shame," said Masha. "Just when things are hottest . . . I would go and cave in. . . . You had to do all the work for me."

"I'll chalk it up against you," replied Rumyantsev gaily. "When you get on your feet again we'll even out the score. Only I won't take anything less than a package of the best tobacco."

"Are you trying to make me feel good?" asked Masha, mildly reproachful.

"Why not?" said Rumyantsev, inhaling and blowing out the smoke.

"You're a queer duck too. . . ." said Masha. "With a wound like mine, people seldom pull through even if they have the best medical attention." Her voice held a note of the superiority of the specialist over the layman, a feeling that impelled her to speak about her own wound as if it were something outside of herself.

"I'm no doctor," said Rumyantsev, "but people don't die of such wounds. You mark my words."

"Ekh, Rumyantsev," murmured Masha. "Why are you talking to me as if I were a despondent soldier. . . . I'm not in the least afraid. . . ."

The idea of death really did not frighten her. And although she told

herself that she might die, actually she did not believe it in her heart of hearts. She even felt a strange interest in her new state, as if she counted on watching her own progress and after that seeing how everything ended. She was silent for a moment, lost in thought.

"Still I'm just a bit sorry," she suddenly said in a quiet and somehow different voice. "I won't hear about our victory."

"Don't get the blues, Masha, you just take a little nap," said Rummyantsev.

...Gorbunov had visited the trenches and examined the damages. He gave orders for niches to be dug in the frozen walls to serve as shelters. He decided that their observation points were inadequate and gave orders to strengthen them. Then he gave permission for bonfires to be built in the school yard, which was sheltered by half-ruined structures. The men could take turns in going there to warm up. He crawled from fox-hole to fox-hole, listening to what the men had to say and giving the necessary orders. He realized that all his efforts were merely putting off for a time the inevitable catastrophe, but he could not sit by idly and wait for the signal. Moreover by busying his men with this customary routine he made it appear that the long-drawn-out delay before the attack was necessary. When the men were occupied they were not so keenly aware of the danger of their position.

So long as he was crawling about in the trenches, Gorbunov did not think of Masha, but he was oppressed by a vague feeling that something extremely distressing had happened. This hazy consciousness of a calamity which was still unnamed but which had already taken place never quit him. He went into the school building, picked up some straw from the floor and mechanically began to brush off the snow from his felt boots. Rummyantsev came up, and glancing at the latter the Lieutenant remembered Masha.

"Have you fixed up the wounded?" asked Gorbunov.

"As much as I could," said Rummyantsev. "In hospital conditions it would have been much better of course."

They went into the room where the wounded were lying. Rummyantsev turned his flashlight on the straw. One after the other the men's figures stood out in the spotlight. They were either sitting or lying down. Some of them had their eyes closed, others blinked, dazzled by the light. One moustached Red Armyman, his face shining with perspiration, stopped groaning and drew his camouflage coverall over his head, as if he wanted to be left alone with his sufferings.

"That man's in torment," the Sergeant whispered to Gorbunov, "and there's nothing I can do to help him. . . ."

Masha was lying against the wall. Her eyes were closed and her face was as white as her hoar-frost covered hair. And although her features had not changed in the slightest, to the Lieutenant her face seemed alien and perhaps even more beautiful, but as if it no longer belonged to a living being. Her arms were outstretched at her sides. From under her coveralls, a pair of big new felt boots showed, lying neatly side by side, motionless, as if they were on display on a shelf.

The thought flashed through Gorbunov's mind that Masha had died. He suddenly remembered his first sight of her two months ago. Along the

autumn streets of the frontline village, muddy with the rain, a girl in a wadded jacket was walking along hurriedly, jumping over the puddles. Her arms were slightly akimbo and she swung them slightly in time to her light step. She swayed the least bit as she walked, as if she were being borne along on invisible waves of vigour and vitality. She was smiling at her own thoughts. The Lieutenant had turned round, following the girl with his eyes, and then had continued on his own way, angry with himself both for having turned to look at her and at the same time for not having tried to find out who she was. Later he had met her in the regimental ambulance unit. He had learned her name, found out that she had enlisted, that she did not know Latin, but to make up for it could throw a grenade with the best, that she had wanted to be a scout, but for some reason had not been accepted. At the end of their conversation she had asked him for a German officer's revolver, if he could get one. Several days later Gorbunov had made her a present of a captured Browning. Masha had turned the small revolver over and over in her hands and had said:

"A lady's toy. . . . All the typists at Staff Headquarters carry them."

"Next time I'll get you a howitzer," Gorbunov had said in a huff.

He had looked at her round face with the snub nose, at her moist even teeth, and thought that actually she was no different from many other girls. He could not understand why the sight of Masha afforded him particular pleasure, or why he was always vaguely disappointed when he failed to meet her at the first-aid station. Later she had been assigned to his unit. He saw her more often now, but circumstances obliged him to conduct himself more formally. Nevertheless, whenever he pictured his future wife to himself, she either resembled a beautiful movie actress from the latest film he had seen or was wholly reminiscent of Masha. Even the voice of his future wife was just as high-pitched, musical and girlish.

All this flashed through the Lieutenant's mind as he gazed at the ghost-white face of the girl who was lying on the straw so motionlessly in the circle of light. He did not remember their meetings, conversations or events in ordered sequence, but merely felt the extent of his loss in a momentary stab of pain. At that moment it was not the young girl or his unit's medical officer, a brave and dear comrade, whom he was regretting. He was regretting the fact that he had lost something which had lived in him unknown to himself, and with which it was therefore particularly hard to part.

"Dead?" asked Gorbunov curtly.

"She's breathing," said Rumyantsev.

Only now did Gorbunov notice the light vapour rising from the girl's parted lips.

"She won't pull through," said Rumyantsev. "Lost too much blood."

"We ought to do something," said Gorbunov.

"What can be done?" asked the Sergeant. "Perhaps in a hospital it would be possible to do something. . . ."

He opened his first-aid kit and began to rummage around in it. One after another he took out phials with cryptic inscriptions, examined them thoughtfully and put them back. He took out a hypodermic, touched the needle cautiously, examined the colour of the tube and then put it back in

the cotton wool. For a long time he gazed at a box of ampules that were filled with a thick yellowish liquid, while Gorbunov watched his every motion with a vague feeling of hope. In the translucent phials that the Sergeant was holding gleamed the magic power to preserve life. It only needed to be taken out of its fragile shell. And perhaps Rumyantsev—brave man that he was and hero, skilled mechanic, successful, a man who could do everything—was capable of penetrating its secret. After all there are such inspired moments, when the impossible proves possible and the miraculous becomes a fact. But Rumyantsev carefully closed the box with the ampules and put it back in the kit bag. Then he took out a white bottle with a glass stopper, read the label and announced confidently:

"Iodine."

Gorbunov gazed at him glumly, turned on his heel and walked out of the room. Masha was dying and he was powerless to help her. He closed the door after him and glanced round at the dark, icy room with the oval breach in the wall.

In one corner a group of men were talking in undertones. Gorbunov sat down on the straw. The observer did not report to him, which meant that the signal for the attack had not yet been given. It seemed to the Lieutenant that if only the attack would begin right then and there, Masha would be saved. After joining Podlaskin's group, he would hand her over to a doctor together with the other wounded men. He was already convinced of the omnipotence of this unknown doctor, because the only chance always seems like the saving one. Jumping to his feet, he walked over to the breach. Moodily he gazed out into the bluish, frosty haze. The success of the battle and the life of his men now depended on one and the same thing.

He felt a grinding impatience. Unable to suppress this feeling, he began to pace the room, like a man waiting on the platform for the arrival of a train that is overdue. Gripping his tommy gun, which was white with frost, the Lieutenant strode back and forth from the breach to the door.

Suddenly he noticed that the men who had been chatting in the corner had grown silent and were watching him closely. He walked the length of the room slowly once again, then turned and sat down in his old place near the wall.

Somehow he had a keen sensation of being quite alone. All the men here saw in him an experienced officer with whom they were always ready to take any risk. In case of success, the main credit accrued to him. In moments of difficulty the men looked to him with hope. His every gesture, intonation, mannerism and mood were commented on in the greatest detail. "The Lieutenant's fidgetty," the men might say, and that would have been a bad sign. "The Lieutenant's in high spirits," they would remark, and that meant that all was well. The self-confidence of the commander was, as it were, common property, and therefore he had to keep a grip on himself.

But for himself there was no one, it seemed, from whom he could draw the composure that was necessary for all. And although the Red Army men had faith in his strength of character, this faith was not obligatory on Gorbunov himself. It demanded much from him and helped him little. Even Ivanovsky, with whom the Lieutenant might have discussed things, was

not at hand. The Political Officer had been wounded at the very outset of the engagement and was already in the rear. Gorbunov was alone, and alone he had to decide. His will, as the will of every commander on his own, was put to the test, but this was something that no one else must know.

Gorbunov sat there with his hands on his knees, smoking in leisurely fashion. He thought again of Captain Podlaskin, going over all the possible reasons for his delay. But since he himself had carried out his part of the mission, he could not find any excuse for the other. He was furious, and at that moment hated this ill-starred Captain, the only one who was to blame for their inevitable joint failure. Gorbunov smoked his cigarette to the end and slowly crushed the stub on the floor.

"There are such things as botches," he thought, "but devil take it, orders must be carried out. . . ."

Rumyantsev came up.

"Comrade Commander," he said, "I want to ask you to appoint me for evacuation."

"For evacuation?" asked Gorbunov.

"To take the wounded to the first-aid station—Ryzhova and Semenikhin."

"To the first-aid station?" questioned Gorbunov.

"I'm thinking of taking four men along as orderlies. We'll get back just in time for the funeral."

Gorbunov stared at Rumyantsev with bright, cold eyes.

"No," said the Lieutenant, "I don't permit that."

"I understand," said Rumyantsev, although he understood nothing. "Will you appoint someone else?"

"There's no need," said the Lieutenant.

There was nothing comforting in Rumyantsev's proposal. The Lieutenant himself had already been thinking of how to get the wounded men away but had been obliged to abandon the idea. In order to break through the fire of the enemy Tommy-guns in the grove, four men would not suffice. To all appearances even ten would not be enough. Gorbunov did not know the strength of the Germans who had penetrated to his rear, and he had no right to split up his small detachment.

"Our mission is to drive the Fritz out of the village," said Gorbunov. "We'll put off the evacuation for an hour or two."

It occurred to him that when Masha had been well, and he had been seeing her every day, he had not bothered about analysing his feelings towards her. They had become clear to himself only now, merely to intensify the bitterness and distress of these hours.

Once again the Germans opened fire. The first mortar bombs landed about fifty metres behind the school building. Four blindingly white explosions had flashed simultaneously through the fog. Snow mixed with smoke whirled into the air in slanting funnels. Then everyone heard the pattering thud of earth sprinkling down on the ground. The next bombs

fell closer, but somewhat to one side. They burst four in a row, straddling the school building, now behind it, now in front of it, with exactly the same intervals between volleys. The blasts were drawing closer to the trenches, filling them with the odour of burning explosives.

Once again the Lieutenant crept along the line of his fortifications. He stopped near the men lying in the snow and said a few words about the enemy who might indeed reach them, but who would never live to get away again. He repeated his orders to the unit commanders: to stay put, and if the Fritzies attacked, to wipe them out. He ordered some of the men into the school building, behind the shelter of walls. The bombs kept landing closer and closer. Every time the men heard the mounting zoom of the next bomb they hugged the snow, and some of them closed their eyes.

Gorbunov returned to the school building. The Germans had moved their battery. It was impossible to locate it, and the Lieutenant ordered his men to hold fire.

He sat down on the straw with his back against the wall, his legs crossed. To all appearances he was unruffled, and when anyone addressed him, he replied calmly and quietly. But he saw and heard everything now with a sort of extraordinary vividness, and reacted with lightning speed. He had to force himself to speak slowly. From time to time he straightened the strap of his tommy gun, although there was no need to do so. Becoming aware that he was doing this too often, he dropped his hand and clenched his fists. He tried not to think of how good it would have been if the attack had taken place exactly according to plan, and he nearly succeeded in keeping this disturbing thought out of his mind. He gave orders for the submachine gun to be moved to the flank, which seemed to him inadequately protected. Then he ordered the machine-gunner to train his machine gun immediately so that he could open aimed fire in case the Germans showed up. But behind all these thoughts lay another, buried in his subconscious mind, but somehow entering into his very blood, tensing and straining his muscles to no purpose. Like a shadow it loomed over all his other thoughts, tinging them with its own hue. The signal for the joint attack had still not been given and although he told himself that there was no sense in waiting for the rocket any longer, he was only trying to deceive his own expectation, which had become unbearable.

Mortar bombs were bursting at regular intervals. In the lulls between the blasts, the Lieutenant could hear a low conversation. Lugovikh, Dvoyeglazov and Kochesov were sitting not far from him and conversing, heedless of the enemy fire.

"Our makhorka's all gone, damn it," said Lugovikh.

Dvoyeglazov took a package of German cigars out of his pocket, tore open the crackling cellophane wrapper and with a grand gesture held out the elegant package to his mates.

"Help yourselves," he urged.

The men lit up. They were sitting comfortably, bandying words, but making no extra movements, having learned, like most veterans, to value every minute of leisure.

"Strong!" said Lugovikh approvingly.



"Havanna," remarked Dvoyeglazov.

"I could do with a good plate of hot *shchi* now," said Kochesov.

"There'll be no dinner today," announced Dvoyeglazov.

"They'll bring it up tomorrow," countered Kochesov.

"And maybe tomorrow I won't be here any more," said Dvoyeglazov.

Four explosions roared quite close by. For a second it grew lighter, and the men felt a gust of air fan their faces.

"They're feeling around," remarked Kochesov.

"Did you hear yesterday's communique?" asked Lugovikh. "Our front is attacking."

"That's how it is," remarked Kochesov.

"True enough," confirmed Dvoyeglazov.

He flicked the ash from his cigar and put it back in his mouth. His thin face with the lively, merry eyes, was wreathed in smoke.

"How's it out there where you come from, Kochesov?" asked Lugovikh.

"Do you have the good old Russian frosts?"

"The frosts out our way are milder," replied Kochesov. "But to make up for it the heat's worse."

New explosions boomed, and plaster showered down on the men from the ceiling. The men fell silent, hunching up their shoulders and listening intently.

"Wonder what my Tanya's doing now?" said Dvoyeglazov.

"Sleeping most likely at this time of night," replied Lugovikh.

"You're probably right," said Dvoyeglazov thoughtfully. "And feeling nothing at all. . . . And here am I sitting under fire. . . ."

"How can she feel anything?" asked Lugovikh.

"What I'd like to know," said Dvoyeglazov, voicing his thoughts out loud, "is whether she's playing me fair or not? It would be a shame if she'd go fooling around with any of those guys in the rear."

"My old woman'd never do that," declared Kochesov with conviction.

"Who knows?" sighed Dvoyeglazov wistfully.

"I've been getting letters from home fairly regularly," said Lugovikh, "and in my letters I've been telling my wife all about the atrocities of the Fritzes. And in every letter I get she tells me to put everything I've got into wiping out those skunks. She sure hates those Nazis!"

"Let me tell you, I'm fed up with the Germans, too!" exclaimed Dvoyeglazov.

Four deafening explosions shook the walls. The men fell flat, as if they had been squeezed down from above. A sweetish smoke crept in through the breach and slowly dispersed.

"A night to remember," said Dvoyeglazov, raising his head. He groped around for his cigar, which had dropped to the floor, inspected it carefully and put it in his mouth again.

"They're getting the range," remarked Kochesov.

"I'm a mason by trade," said Dvoyeglazov. "When the war's over we'll be putting up a monument to victory somewhere. If I'm still alive I'm going to make it my business to take a hand in the building. . . ."

A wounded man was brought in to Rumyantsev. A second came in himself, holding his wounded arm in front of him. Then two men carried in Mitkin, the runner, and lowered him to the floor in front of Gorbunov.

They had noticed Mitkin crawling out of the grove, leaving a long dark trail behind him on the faintly glimmering snow. He was moving on his side, dragging himself forward with one arm and helping with his feet, repeating the same movement over and over again. Whenever he came to a hollow or a fallen tree he crawled over it without turning aside, even though this must have required a tremendous effort. It looked as if he simply did not see the obstacle and pulled himself over it without even noticing that he had done so. But he kept throwing out his arm blindly with a sort of dogged persistence, hitching himself forward on one elbow, burying his hand in the snow again and dragging himself a few centimetres further. He was making very slow headway. The men saw that he was wounded and had crawled out to meet him.

When they had put him on a ground sheet, he had asked weakly but insistently:

"Where's the Lieutenant? I have orders."

He sighed and then crumpled up immediately. He had been wounded in several places and had lost a great deal of blood. It was a miracle that he had managed to get so far.

He was dying. His eyes were open and in them was an expression not of pain but of intolerable physical exhausture. His lips stirred and Gorbunov bent down to them.

"Orders. . . ." whispered Mitkin in a voice as faint as a sigh.

"I'm here!" said Gorbunov. "Tell me!"

But Mitkin no longer heard anything. Slowly he turned over on his side and his uninjured hand stretched out in front of him. His breathing became more and more laboured. Every breath of air he drew caused a lump in his throat and tore at his chest. The intervals between breaths grew longer and longer, and after each breath the men waited to see whether another would follow. They were still waiting for the next breath when Mitkin had already ceased breathing forever. He lay on his side, his arm outstretched, his heel dug into the ground as if he were still crawling forward with the undelivered order.

They placed his body against the wall and covered it with a ground sheet. No dispatch was found in his pockets. The order had evidently been given orally.

Gorbunov walked over to the breach and gazed silently towards the southwest. The runner had returned, his mission accomplished, but Gorbunov was none the wiser. It might be that his detachment had even been ordered to withdraw, but this made no difference now and he would have to hold out. Suddenly he noticed that the woods behind the village were no longer visible. A slow, fine snow was falling and the line of houses at the edge of the gully merged with the grey air.

The Germans had intensified their fire, and explosions were now following in rapid succession. They had evidently brought a new battery into action. Casualties were mounting rapidly and there were already several

killed. Gorbunov knelt down and squinted through a chink between the bricks. He forgot that half an hour earlier he had made up his mind not to expect the signal for the attack any longer. With every minute the number of men who dropped out of the ranks was increasing, and it seemed to him that only the red rocket could save the rest. If the enemy would again take possession of the eastern end of the village, even a belated attack on the part of Podlaskin would meet with no success. The Germans would concentrate their fire power on the southwest, and the village would remain in their hands. The battle, which had required so much effort and taken toll of so many victims, would be lost.

Someone knelt down beside the Lieutenant. Looking round, Gorbunov saw Rumyantsev. He was wiping his perspiring face with wet hands, leaving dark stains on it.

"How are things going with you?" asked Gorbunov.

"Ryzhova's still alive!" shouted Rumyantsev.

"I'm asking how the wounded are?" yelled Gorbunov.

"I haven't any more dressings," replied Rumyantsev.

"Tear up the shirts!" ordered Gorbunov.

"Well, I'm off," replied Rumyantsev.

He made his way to the door on his hands and knees. The walls were shaking with the force of the explosions. From time to time blasts of air rushed in through the breach and Gorbunov would be thrown onto his side, while the snow blinded his eyes. Wiping them, he again resumed his watch through the chink. By now he no longer blamed anyone for the delay with the rocket. What was important was that it should flare up in spite of everything.

The commander of the second unit made his way to the school building with the utmost difficulty. He fell, got up and crawled along the ground, which was trembling with the rapid concussions. He came to the building covered with snow, and bending low hurried over to Gorbunov. Getting to his knees he shouted:

"Comrade Lieutenant, our ranks are thinning!"

Gorbunov gazed at Medvedovsky's distorted face and cracked lips. Then he threw his arms around his neck and pulled his head down as if he wanted to kiss him.

"You're weakening," he shouted, and his angry eyes darkened. "Dig yourselves in and stay put!"

Medvedovsky placed his lips against Gorbunov's ear and said as if he were whispering a secret to him:

"My men will hold out!" And crouching low he ran along the wall to the door.

The Germans had brought their artillery into play and the barrage had become murderously withering. The rumble, whistle and roar merged in a single intolerable din. The overheated air groaned and wailed, throwing the men off their feet, tearing them away from the ground and plunging them into the snow. The ground rocked under their flattened bodies, having lost its stability and solidity. It flew aloft like gas, flaring up, whistling, burning and swirling. The men neither shouted nor spoke, clutching

at something that had been the ground. From time to time they glanced at one another with a fixed, concentrated stare, and then turned aside because what they saw in each other's eyes was one and the same expectation. It made the men look strangely alike. But these men were Russian soldiers and therefore were carrying out their orders even when it seemed impossible. Liaison men crawled from trench to trench. Commanders transmitted their orders in sign language. Observers dug themselves out of the snow that showered down on them and continued their observations.

Still there was no red rocket, and Gorbunov realized that the men defending this zone were indeed melting away. Fury flooded him. His muscles tensed like the muscles of a man about to jump, and his jaw set so tightly that his teeth gritted. Just as when he had been a child and it had seemed to him that he could direct the course of events by the mere force of a great desire, his whole being was focussed in an imperative "I want!" He asked, waited and willed. He was physically aware of this fierce exertion of his will power. But in the impenetrable grey fog in the southwest no signal appeared. He could hear the thumping of his own heart. Unable to restrain himself any longer, he jumped up and straightened his back. At the same instant a terrible roar shook the building. Gorbunov felt as if the ceiling were crashing down on his head. A shell had landed in the floor above, and plaster, rubble and sand showered down on him.

Suddenly the barrage stopped. And in the surprising silence that followed, the observer blurted out:

"The Nazis are attacking!"

5

The snow was fluttering down slowly. In its monotonous grey flicker Gorbunov made out vague dark figures. They were sliding down the slope of the gully, and above them new lines of shadows were emerging from behind the dim curtain of falling snow.

"A scene that promises much," remarked Dvoyeglazov, settling down at the breach with his tommy gun.

Gorbunov felt relieved. Now he knew exactly what had to be done. Now he could think of nothing else but this, for the approaching imponderable silhouettes overshadowed everything. Without turning his head he shouted:

"Open fire!"

After that nothing else could be heard for the rattling of the tommy guns. Crouching at the windows, the men fired away. The room was lit up with a dancing, feverish light, as if dozens of blinding lamps were swaying and blinking, highlighting for an instant in the darkness the screwed-up eyes and bristly cheeks, the gaping hole in the ceiling, and the litter and straw underfoot.

Lugovikh and Kochesov were firing beside Dvoyeglazov. Grey wisps of smoke rose to the ceiling.

Gorbunov dashed upstairs to find out what damages had been done by

the exploding shell. A few of the classrooms and the room in which the dead teacher lay were blocked with debris so that it was impossible to get in. Luckily the machine-gunners were unharmed and had resumed firing. The hot cartridge shells were showering onto the floor with a bound.

"Our ammunition is giving out," said the No. 1 in a pause between bursts.

"Hand over," said Gorbunov.

He knelt down and sighted a group consisting of several shadows. The muscles on his cheek twitched. He fired a brief burst and the shadows disappeared.

"The Nazis'll give out before your ammunition does," said Gorbunov getting up.

He made his way to the corner room and from the window looked out on the whole line of his trenches. Down there lay his men, almost invisible in their white coveralls. But spurts of flame like electric sparks outlined the whole icy salient of the breastworks.

The Germans had halted, and the fire began to die down. Gorbunov went downstairs and sent Rumyantsev to the unit commanders with orders to keep a sharp watch for an attack from the rear. Then he made the rounds of his men.

"How are things?" he asked Lugovikh.

"So-so," replied the latter as he reloaded his tommy gun. "Anna Polikarpovna will be pleased."

"Your wife?" asked Gorbunov.

"Right," replied Lugovikh.

"You ought to please your wife," remarked Gorbunov. "She'll love you all the more."

"That's right, only it doesn't always help," said Dvoyeglazov.

The Germans opened fire again. The covering machine-gun fire hit the walls of the school building. Fragments of brick sprinkled down and a swarm of invisible bees began to buzz in the room.

"Lie down, Comrade Lieutenant!" shouted Lugovikh.

"Maybe I'd better," said Gorbunov.

He crouched down behind a heap of bricks and looked out from there. The Germans were advancing again. Once again hazy moving figures appeared from behind the curtain of falling snow. The covering machine-gun fire was almost unintermittant. Gorbunov ran up to the corner room again. From there he had a better view of what was going on in his lines. The Germans were crawling and spurting forward, coming into view for several seconds and then dropping out of sight again.

Tommy guns were barking behind the school building, and Gorbunov realized that the Nazis had filtered through so that they surrounded the hill, on which their building stood. They were now pushing on the school building simultaneously from all four sides.

Gorbunov ran into the next room. Two runners dashed in after him. A big dark bird with outspread wings soared in the air under the ceiling. Gorbunov paid no attention to the bird, as if he had expected to find it there.

Through the window he could see the enemy running up the incline to the school. They were only thirty to forty metres away. Gorbunov thrust the muzzle of his tommy gun through the window. He no longer remembered anything. He saw only these dark figures flitting into the ring of his gun sight. He kept up a steady fire, and every bullet seemed to be a part of himself, tearing away from him and mowing down the enemy. The Germans were running, leaping and falling. Some of them sank to the snow slowly, others ran on a few steps, staggering, and then toppled over as well. The runners were firing from a kneeling position. When his disk unexpectedly emptied, Gorbunov cursed and then changed it.

But there was no need to fire any more. The group that had broken through had been wiped out. Gorbunov wheeled round as if he were expecting an attack from the rear. Only then did he notice the bird that was gliding overhead. For a long time he stared at it, wondering how it had come here and why it did not fly away. Suddenly he burst out laughing. The runners stared at their commander in amazement.

"Stuffed," he said out loud. "It's a stuffed bird!"

This had evidently been the zoology room. The dead bird reigned under the ceiling. Strange smashed objects and splintered glass lay on the floor in heaps.

It had begun to snow more heavily. A rippling, steadily falling curtain of snow hid the gully and village from view. Taking advantage of this cover, the Germans had closed in their circle and were drawing closer. Gorbunov could not even send up flares, as they were in the room that had been wrecked by the shell.

The German machine-gunners stopped fire and silence fell, broken by desultory shots. This random firing seemed particularly disturbing. Hundreds of Germans, unseen by them, were closing in from all directions and might show up at any moment. The men seemed to hear faint rustlings and obscure clankings coming from the impenetrable gloom that shrouded the school building. . . . It was hardly audible, but sinister. Everyone imagined all sorts of mysterious movements advancing towards them from all sides out of the darkness.

Gorbunov ran downstairs and stood in the middle of the room, gazing at his comrades. They were all at their posts, standing or sitting near their own loopholes. Rumyantsev came over to him. Kochesov's broad back was bent. Neat piles of cartridge disks and hand grenades lay on the bricks beside him.

"Get the grenades ready," said Lugovikh, whispering for some reason or other.

He did not turn his head as he adjusted his hat with his left hand. Dvoyeglazov was craning his neck and peering straight ahead. He was beating a light tattoo on the floor with the toe of his felt boot. The men were silent, ready for all eventualities. In these moments, each of which might be their last, the men looked just the same as ever.

Glancing round Gorbunov's eyes met Rumyantsev's. Both of them felt rather than thought one and the same thing. The land on which they lived,

which was so difficult to cover even by plane, was now narrowed down to the small site of this school building. They and their comrades were the only people here, because their friends could no longer come to their aid, and in the impenetrable darkness that isolated the detachment numerous enemy soldiers were creeping towards them. The men here, at least most of them, no longer had a future, for this future had dwindled down to a single event which was coming straight at them. In a world which was so restricted in space and time, they seemed solitary and quite on their own. Each of them felt this isolation differently, but it drew them together irresistably. Each one felt that all the others were near to him just then with that indispensable degree of human proximity that men so often miss. It was as if all of them had become a single being. This being was ten times as large as any one of them, ten times sadder perhaps, but ten times as strong. Gorbunov had grown pale with emotion and under the stress of a strange and indefinable elation shouted:

"Comrades! The Red Flag of our country is waving over us!"

Rumyantsev took a step forward, his small eyes flashing.

"Long live our Soviet land!" he cried.

Thus they fought against the last vestiges of their solitude. And although the men knew that no Red Flag fluttered over the school building, they seemed to hear overhead the rustling of the raised and streaming folds of precious silk.

"Long live Stalin!" shouted Rumyantsev.

And for a second all who were here saw Stalin. He rose before their mind's eye, calm and smiling, as in a portrait. He entered the half-ruined, freezing schoolroom to take a look at each one of them and to encourage them. It was as if the Commander-in-Chief in his grey army coat were making the rounds of his men before the decisive battle.

"Long live the Soviet Union!" shouted Dvoyeglazov. His gaunt face was lit up with indescribable exultation.

Gazing at one another the soldiers shouted out the battle cries of their struggle. They had heard them time without number before, but the familiar words rang out and glowed at that moment with all their latent meaning. These words not only stood for the essence of human life, they made it invincible and eternal. The little spot which they held immediately became crowded. The whole tremendous world which they had only just lost seemed to have entered here, roaring and jostling. Their native land surrounded the men, and the end of their lives, which was already in sight, moved off and became invisible. The future bloomed once more and gave tongue far ahead, much further than the span of a single human life.

"Long live our country!" shouted the men.

Lugovikh seized his Tommy gun and brandished it in the air. Gorbunov smiled happily. The wounded men came out of the room in which Rumyantsev had set up his hospital. They stood in the doorway, supporting one another or leaning on their rifles. Those who could still move returned to the ranks, and room was made for them. A lanky youngster, limping on one leg, sank to the floor beside Kochesov.

"Shove over," he said simply.

Kochesov moved over and the wounded man rested his rifle on the bricks.

"How are things here? Where are those snakes?" he said, as he inserted a cartridge.

Gorbunov caught sight of Masha. She was sitting near the door, her back to the wall, her hands pressed tightly to her breast. And although it was impossible to understand how she could possibly have crawled so far, Gorbunov was not surprised. Nothing that was taking place now seemed miraculous any more. Suffering and death seemed to have lost their power over his comrades. He would not have been surprised if the dead Mitkin had come out of his dark corner, taken up his tommy gun and stood at the window. What Gorbunov was experiencing at that moment was like some miraculous emancipation. All fear, all the cares that accompany man and disfigure him had fallen away, leaving behind only what was priceless in him—his love, his hatred, his will to endless life.

The men gathered in this school building were all different. That same day, some two or three kilometres away from here, they had differed from one another in character, habits, inclinations, successes or failures. Among them were bold and timid, cheerful and gloomy, sociable and unfriendly, those who loved and those who avoided their comrades. But now all of them glowed with an amazing purity and passion, which made them invulnerable in equal measure to bullets and to envy, to death and to pride. There was nothing impossible for these men now, because their native land had entered them. The weakest and most timid were no different from all the others, and all here were heroes, for the country makes her sons in her own likeness.

. . . Gorbunov hastened over to Masha. He bent over her and the girl said softly:

"Give me a grenade. . . ."

The Lieutenant unhooked a grenade and Masha took it with both hands.

"I want it in case. . . ." she said.

Shots were rattling on the other side of the wall. At the same instant, some twenty paces away from the breach, black figures loomed up. Flames spurted from their breasts. The Germans were firing their tommy guns as they ran. They were met by a volley. Kochesov jumped up and flung a grenade.

"Catch!" he yelled, and did not hear the sound of his own voice.

The grenade burst at the feet of the tommy-gunners. Outflung arms and falling bodies flickered in the sharp tongues of flame. Snow whirled aloft as if it had been thrown up by the ground.

New figures appeared from behind the curtain of dusk and snow. They seemed to precipitate out of the darkness and separate from it in black lumps. Gorbunov felt a blow in his shoulder, and his left arm sank heavily to his side. Searing his lips on the icy metal of a hand grenade, he pulled out the pin with his teeth and flung it as if he himself wanted to fly after it.

Fighting was raging all along the line. The Germans were almost at the building and were now trying to take it by storm. All around the





“THANK YOU, MY DEAR!”

*Pencil Drawing by Nikolai Zhukov*



IN THE TRENCH (BYELORUSSIA)

*Pencil Drawing by Ivan Titkov*

hill white spurts of flame flashed and clouds of smoke rose into the icy night air.

The first lines of the attacking forces were mown down. Again no one was visible in the gloom of the night. Rumyantsev came up to Gorbunov.

"Let me dress your shoulder, Comrade Lieutenant."

Gorbunov stared at the Sergeant with amazement, then remembered that he had indeed been wounded.

"Just a tick," he said and ran out of the room. He wanted to see what was going on in the trenches.

He stepped out onto the porch and suddenly, in the turbid grey depths that lay to the southwest, he saw a flame, tiny and red as a ruby. The flame breathed, burned, flared, rising higher and higher, leaving behind it a slender rosy trail. Gorbunov stopped short, stunned. At last he was seeing the red flame in the southwest! The rocket described an arc and hung aloft like a crimson-rayed flower on a drooping, glowing stem.

Gorbunov hurried down and stood in front of the school building, his uninjured hand squeezing his left shoulder. Turning round, he shouted the order to attack, and his voice was heard by all. Then, never once taking his eyes from the red rocket and with never a backward glance, he plunged ahead. He felt the warm blood oozing from his shoulder into the palm of his right hand. Behind his back, he heard shouts of "Hurrah!" sweet as music, and knew that his men were following him. He strode on, and shouting men overtook him to right and to left.

The flower gleaming in the heavens suddenly wilted and sprinkled down in a shower of fiery petals. But at the same moment a blazing light rent the sky in the southwest, spreading rapidly. It looked as if the falling flame had set fire to a sea.

The men overtook Gorbunov and ran ahead. A long-legged Red Armyman caught up with him. He was hopping along on one leg, using his rifle as a crutch, shouting and flourishing a grenade. A hand-to-hand fight had already begun up forward. Shots rang out, and Gorbunov quickened his step. Podlaskin's group had most likely broken into the village, as he could hear heavy firing from there and the flames were lighting up everything round about, lacerating and driving the retreating night before them.

... In the morning the Colonel rang up Gorbunov, enquired after his health and advised him to go to the field hospital. Then he heard the Lieutenant's report, brief and to the point, as all good reports are.

"It was a very successful operation," said the Colonel. "The Germans were so engrossed in attacking the school that Podlaskin took them with bare hands. Our casualties were small on the whole, but as for the Germans I only wish everyone would do for as many as your men did for!"

Gorbunov no longer felt angry with Captain Podlaskin. He had actually been unable to attack earlier. The sappers had cleared the minefields at the approaches to the village on time. But at the last moment new minefields had been discovered blocking the exit from the woods. The sappers had worked with a valour and speed unsurpassed even for their profession.

Podlaskin had heard the sound of the battle that Gorbunov was waging, had seen the flaming sky in the East and had hurried his men, his finger ever on the trigger of the rocket pistol. Now, much to Gorbunov's surprise, he was priding himself most of all on how the unforeseen obstacle had been overcome. And although this pride seemed to have little justification in Gorbunov's eyes, it convinced and disarmed him. Most likely if anyone else had been in the Captain's place he would not have been able to act any better. Still his recollections of the recent hours impelled Gorbunov to seek at least for understanding if not sympathy. Like Podlaskin, proud of the victory, the Lieutenant too had something to tell in his turn. But to speak to the Colonel about his hours of waiting when the latter was at that moment directing a big offensive seemed uncalled for and even petty. Gorbunov merely remarked that the time during which communications had been disrupted had made the situation unclear to him.

"What do you mean unclear?" asked the Colonel. "Once you take a position, you must hold it to the last. As for the enemy, you must pitch into them wherever they appear. I can't allow of any lack of clarity in such questions. . . ."

Gorbunov agreed with the commander. The battle had ended in a victory and now everything seemed different from what it had looked like at night, even to Gorbunov himself. It all seemed simpler and comparatively easy.

"Podlaskin was held up by the minefields," said the Colonel. "Such things happen. . . . The Captain ran into mines while the Germans ran into you. . . . As a matter of fact it even turned out quite luckily. . . . Well, take a rest, Gorbunov. We've cleaned out the Tommy-gunners in the grove. . . . Convey my thanks to your men. . . ."

Judging by his voice, the Colonel was in high spirits. His units were advancing rapidly and the sound of battle was already coming from far beyond the village.

Gorbunov came out of the cottage supporting his bandaged arm with his sound hand. Beyond the gully, on a low hill, he could see the school. It was a dull, sunless day. The blank windows and big oval breach in the brick wall looked like blots on the half-ruined building. The traces of the fighting had been covered over by the snow that had fallen during the night.

Gorbunov walked down the street thinking that he would have to write to his mother that day. Then he thought how nice it would be to send her a package. Past him walked two women with tear-stained, happy faces. They looked at him with unconcealed admiration and he smiled to them. He caught sight of Kochesov and Dvoyeglazov. They were coming towards him, carrying dixies and loaves of bread. The Lieutenant stopped. He wanted to say something particularly nice to these men.

"Going to have a feast?" he asked, although he knew quite well that they were.

"Right you are, Comrade Lieutenant," replied Dvoyeglazov.

The Lieutenant and the men stood there, smiling at one another sheepishly, and shy of words.

Rumyantsev came up and reported that the sled was ready. Gorbunov had to leave for the field hospital. He did not intend staying there, but he wanted to see Masha Ryzhova. Remembering her, Gorbunov began to worry again. She had been conscious when they had evacuated her to the rear, and had even asked to be the last to be sent.

"Stubborn lass," he thought, "she'll pull through!"

As the sled drove out of the village, Gorbunov looked back. The men were walking along the street in grimy coveralls. It occurred to him that he would have to see about getting new ones issued to them that very day. His arm was extremely painful and he frowned with every jolt. At the bend in the road he once again caught sight of the red building with the blank dark windows. Then the road dipped into the gully and the school was lost to view.



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VASSILI GROSSMAN

## A VETERAN



It happened on July 3, 1941. He came home from work in the evening, and before having supper went out into the yard to chop some firewood. His big worker's hands raised the axe high overhead, and the tough, knotty log creaked and split at the strong, swift blow.

"Hi there, Kanaev, you home, are you?" the Chairman of the Village Soviet called out to him.

Slowly he put down his axe, kicked a big chip that had flown off onto the pile of kindling wood he had chopped, wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and walked over to the fence. He walked calmly, with a smile on his lips, but his heart was beating fast with apprehension.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You know yourself," said the Chairman. "Sign here."

With a smoke-stained finger he pointed to the bottom of a sheet of foolscap.

While Kanaev was signing his name, the Chairman said:

"Well, Vanya, I hope you lick the enemy and come back home safe and sound."

"All right now," said Kanaev, "I know about licking the enemy myself, but don't forget my wife's in the family way and then there are the two old people and the children. You get my meaning, don't you?"

"I do," said the Chairman.

"OK. Then that's settled. Well, so long."

As he walked back to the house, the Chairman called after him:

"The cart'll call for you at six."

Kanaev stopped short in the middle of the yard and stood there for a few moments.

"Ekhh, didn't even manage to lay in a bit of firewood for them."

And all sorts of troubled thoughts about his wife, the old folks, the children and his unfinished work began to buzz in his head. There were dozens of things he should attend to. But he'd never have time!

He went into the house and in a loud voice said:

"Well, wife, call the neighbours in and run down to the store for some drinks, I'm leaving tomorrow."

His mother and his wife burst into tears.

"Come, come, what's the idea!" he said sternly. "After all, you know where I'm going!"

"Daddy's going to fight the fascists," said his little girl.

He stroked her hair, and sorrow squeezed his heart.

He had a good send-off. Everyone sang, even the old folks joining in.

They sang many songs. Holding out his blackened worker's hand, Kanaev said to his guests:

"I know how to shoot. I've served my term in the army already. Don't worry, I won't miss when the time comes."

He left in the morning. What a morning it was! Dew glistened in the meadow, as far and wide and sparkling as life in the days of peace. As he jolted along, Kanaev's thoughts were with his home town, Dubrovichi. What a lot of work he had put in there: as a stevedore, in the brick yards, in the peat bogs, five years as a boatman for the factory—pulling a five-hundred pood load against the current. His face was grim and he did not utter a single word to the driver all the way to Solocha, where he had to report.

The Russian has a big heart. There is a great deal of tenderness and love in his heart, both for his own family and for his friends, for his native land and for hard work. And as he was riding off to the war, he thought of all he was leaving behind him, of all that was receding further and further with every step of the horse. Yes, Kanaev had something to fight for. And in those grim summer days, when the sky was clear and limpid, while iron clouds moved heavily over the ground from the West, millions of Ivan Kanaevs were travelling West on collective farm carts in the same way in order to encounter and repulse the enemy.

He was assigned to the mobile rifle battalion of a tank brigade. With this battalion he arrived at the front, with this battalion he went through a campaign that is without equal in history, and with this battalion he is still fighting today. Here he found friends, here won universal love and respect, here he became a veteran, calm, courageous, stern and kind at the same time. Here he disclosed the wealth of his pure soul—a Russian soldier, a man of lofty and strict morals. Here he joined the Communist Party.

The battalion's first engagement was Kanaev's first fight as well. It took place at Lipovka. The battalion dug in at night. Just at sunrise, the enemy opened machine-gun fire on the left flank and set fire to a number of gasoline drums. The battalion withdrew to the forest and opened fire. At first everything seemed strange and terrifying to Kanaev. He crouched just as low when he heard the shells going over from his own lines as he did at enemy shells. The whistle of bullets flying high over his head made

him fall flat, and he could not distinguish between the sound of gunfire and the sound of an exploding shell. The whine of mortar bombs gave him a feeling of anguish. Gradually, however, he was carried away by the fever of battle, and he felt the elation of fighting. True enough, the first time he went into action he was scarcely conscious of what he did, as if he were drunk. His head was in a fog and he himself could not recall what he had said or what he had done. It was the Political Officer who reminded him of how he had come running up during one of the tensest moments of the battle clutching the magazines of some machine guns that had been wrecked by German fire and shouting:

"Comrade Political Officer, let's fight to the last!"

They told him that he had been one of the first to jump into a German trench, just before dusk.

"Maybe, maybe," he said with embarrassment. "But I don't remember a thing myself."

That night he could not fall asleep for a long time. But then almost no one slept. Everyone was talking over the events of the day. That night Kanaev said for the first time:

"Ekh, we've got a good bunch in our battalion." Before that he used to say: "Back home, in Dubrovichi."

But now he felt that the men with whom he was linked by a great common cause, by blood, were as near and dear to him as the friends of his childhood, as his fellow workers, as his own brothers.

He spent a long time in giving his rifle a thorough cleaning, clicking the bolt and screwing up his eye as he peered into the muzzle. And even later, when he had settled down for the night, he kept touching it all the time.

"Swell rifle I've got," he whispered, "it's going to fight with me now till the end of the war."

He felt the same respect and tenderness for it as had been transmitted to his kind from generation to generation towards the instruments of labour—the axe, the saw, the plough.

The mobile rifle battalion lived in an environment of fierce and incessant battles. Much blood was shed by the Red Armymen in defence of their land. And the blood they shed welded them in a single unit for all eternity. The battalion became steeled, acquired military experience.

Sometimes Kanaev felt as if he had been fighting all his life. He participated in innumerable route marches, went on reconnaissance scores of times and took part in as many heated skirmishes. Once he went over the top in a bayonet charge, but the Germans had fled. As soon as the Red Armymen's shouts of "Hurrah!" had reached them, they had jumped up and taken to their heels.

At Bogodukhov, Kanaev was wounded. Here is the story in his own words.

"We bumped square into the Germans there—fifteen of us and a whole platoon of them, with an officer in front. I was all keyed up and bent on taking him prisoner. 'Halt!' I shouted. He fired a burst at me. Got me in the arm. 'Well,' thinks I, 'you don't want to surrender, I see!' I drew



a bead on him—my gun's the better of the two in any case—and down he went. I was losing a lot of blood from my wounded arm, but just then I sees a village lad go down right there, hit by a random shot. What was I to do? You see, I have kids myself. Well, I used up the gauze in my first-aid kit on him, made a really top-notch bandage on his shoulder, but the blood was simply gushing out of my own arm. I poured some water over it and my dizziness passed and then our boys came up and bandaged my arm. It was pretty sore for a couple of weeks, but I didn't leave the battalion. Why get stuck in hospitals for nothing? And besides I didn't feel like leaving my outfit."

Winter came. Reinforcements were sent to the battalion, young lads. Speaking to these youngsters, Kanaev realized that he was already a veteran, cool, experienced. It seemed he really knew a lot. Somehow quite spontaneously Kanaev began to be regarded as a teacher and adviser in the company. His conversations with the young Red Armymen and the way he answered their questions were a pleasure to hear. In his words one felt the grim fighting experience, the high morale, and the everyday shrewdness of a veteran soldier.

"I used to have all sorts of funny feelings too when I went over the top, but now I just pitch into it without giving it a second thought. The best time to launch an attack is real early in the morning. Around dawn. It's still darkish and you can see all their firing points, where the machine guns are, and where the tracers are coming from. In short you can make out plainly where they're firing from. And by the time you break through to the village it's already getting light. And in a village it's easier when it's light—you don't get mixed up and you can make out all the ins and outs of the place.

"Just remember, boys, that when our battalion has orders to hold a place we hold it. Our battalion has never once shown its back to the Germans."

Talking about the battalion's traditions, he said:

"We have a golden rule for every Red Armyman: to carry away not only the wounded but also the dead. Just the other day I was stunned, shell-shocked so badly I didn't know which way to turn. One of the boys gave me a hand and carried me out of harm's way. A good pal is a fellow that doesn't duck, that sticks by you to the end. In a fight, that's the best thing to do—stick together."

Ivan Kanaev, private in a mobile rifle battalion, was packing his kit bag for a fifty-kilometre march.

Just then the Assistant Political Officer came up to him and said:

"Kanaev, I say there, Kanaev, you expecting anything in the mail?"

"What's that, what's that?" asked Kanaev, and suddenly catching on cried out excitedly:

"Come on now, Comrade Political Officer, is there really a letter for me?"

The hot blood flooded his swarthy, bronzed face, weathered by the winter sun and the fierce steppe winds. He read the letter in an undertone, frowning and grunting impatiently when he came across a word he could not make out. Around him stood his friends—the men of his company—listening to him. Their faces were grave, and there was a solemn and even somewhat stern expression on the face of the ever-smiling machine-gunner.

"A son," said Kanaev. "Do you hear, mates, my wife's given birth to a son!"

And everyone saw the tears glinting in his eyes.

"The Chairman comes to see us often and we're getting along fine. The collective farm helps us a lot. Don't worry about us," read Kanaev.

And everyone smiled and was pleased, because they all knew about Kanaev's talk with the Chairman before he had left for the front.

When he finished the letter, Kanaev folded it and slipped it into his pocket. Everyone's eyes were on him, but no one said a word. The men seemed to be waiting to hear what he would have to say to them at this moment, which was such a happy one for him.

"You know, mates," he said in a low voice, "I'm just dying to see the kids, especially the mite who was just born. Just to take a peep at them and then I could go on fighting to the end. But what's the use, that's just talk."

That night the battalion set out. The trucks could not make any headway through the deep snow that covered the steppes, and so the mobile infantry advanced on foot. A cruel, icy wind was blowing. The cold nipped the men's faces till they were crimson. Hoarfrost formed on the raised collars of their greatcoats. The men were so tired it would have been a relief to fill their lungs with fresh air, but that was impossible as the bitter frost took away their breath. Kanaev marched along with his usual light, striding gait. The snow squeaked under his boots. From time to time he went over to the men who were lagging behind and said:

"Step on it, step on it now, boys. It's tough, but there's nothing to be done about it. We're fighting for our land."

At 2 a.m. they halted. The exhausted men stretched out on the snow, their backs to the wind, and lit up. The winter stars twinkled over them. It looked as if there too, at a terrific height, the winter wind was blowing, making the starry flames flicker.

A few men had gathered around Kanaev.

"What do you say, Kanaev, you fed up with fighting all these eight months?" asked someone in a hoarse voice.

"In the village I worked too," he said, "dug up as many as three thousand peat bricks a day. Only I've been frozen through this winter, right down to the bone. That's a fact. You sleep on the snow, shooting going on, bombs bursting—it doesn't bother you a bit, you just snore away! That's not easy. But what's the use of talking—that's the kind of war it is. The people are ready for anything, will stand anything. I've seen so much in the villages where the Germans maltreated the inhabitants, I've heard such tales from the women and old folk, that there's

no such thing as being tired for me. And there's no mercy in my heart for the enemy."

Once again the battalion marches on.

Red Armyman Ivan Kanaev marches too, a veteran in the war for liberty. He has covered many kilometres. His face is stern and calm. He has marched under the broiling July sun, lain under the bright moon in an oak forest, stood many long hours drenched to the skin in the autumn, has been seared by the bitter frost in the winter.

At Petrishchevo he lay in the snow the long night through under a withering barrage by the Germans, and then he rose to his feet and said calmly:

"Get up, mates, bullets don't get the bold."

And he led the company into attack.



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MAJOR V. VELICHKO

## HOW THE MIUS FRONT WAS SMASHED



THE six hundred kilometre march of our forces from Stalingrad to Rostov was concluded in the early spring of 1943. From the Volga to the Sea of Azov!

The troops did not rest.

They forged ahead, fighting.

The Mius River was reached, and the front came to a halt, digging into the rock and the ground.

And here everyone was disappointed.

"What a shabby thing this Mius is! Can't even see the water!"

But the old men, the local inhabitants, as lean as rakes after what they had been through under German occupation, shook their heads:

"Oh, sons, God grant that you cross this Mius! . . ."

In 1943, after freeing Rostov, the Soviet forces tackled the Mius. Many months passed and many events occurred.

The first to get an inkling of what the Mius was really like were the scouts. A party of scouts under Sergeant Major Karlygin crossed to the other side of the river and there found out what the Mius of 1942 had been like. The party was making its way through the reeds and had already passed the danger zone when the leading scout noticed some men lying on the ground ahead of them.

"Our men!" he exclaimed, recognizing their uniforms. "They're sleeping, the devils! . . ."

The scouts rushed forward to the men and stopped in silence: the fighters were sleeping the sleep of eternity. They were sailors. They lay in a row, seventeen men with their tommy guns, in pea jackets and sailor hats. The helmets and grenades fastened to their belts were thickly covered with rust. Sturdy men these sailors had been, although time had robbed them of their muscles.

"It's us, mates. . . . Friends," said Karlygin, "come back to the Mius again."

Galaktion, an elderly moustached scout, murmured:

"Just figure it out, they've been lying here a year waiting for us. We shouldn't take their guns away. They are fighters guarding our country."

All around spring breathed in the air. Bare shoots rustled and reeds murmured. The moon threw a bright light on the rocky cliffs along which the German defences stretched.

## I

The Germans were almost two years in creating the Mius line.

According to their designs it was to have bottled in the Donbas completely and forever, sealing it off from the rest of Russia. By throwing this line around the all-Union colliery like a giant chain, the Germans wanted to shackle the Donbas to Germany as a captive to a wall.

The Mius line was accorded special and extraordinary attention and made a separate front—the Mius Front.

Captured Fritzes would hold a finger aloft and say through their noses:

"The Mius Front—colossal! . . ."

It lay along the eastern bank of the Mius and extended as far as the Sea of Azov. The unscalable hills, cliffs and precipices of the eastern bank towered over the surrounding terrain. Pushed to the fore by nature itself, the Sambek Hills dominated the front like a bastion. They commanded a view and firing range over a tremendous area.

What was the Mius Front? What was being done there?

Observers along the whole line of our front invariably reported: "The Germans are digging in." Their reports invariably bore the remark: "Observed: earthwork." Later the remark began to appear: "Observed: a tin can." This meant that the new trench was already occupied by new Germans.

The Mius Front grew more compact. Ever new German detachments and auxiliary materiel kept pressing into the ground like herring in a barrel.

It was indeed a solid wall. Not a sound, not a single clear movement came from there. It could only be sensed that there was a line of seething snakes' nests, hissing, squirming and vicious.

Slowly, but surely it was deciphered. Thousands of observation points carried on incessant, tense work day and night. Observers moved forward to the outer rim, rose into the air, took photographs. Ground observers took notes every ten minutes. By devious paths, making their way through minefields, crawling under the muzzles of machine guns in the German fortifications, scouts penetrated to their goal. . . .

On a thirty-metre sheer cliff overhanging the Mius was a German pillbox. The Fritz machine-gunners, who lived here in complete safety, would yell down at night:

"Russ, come on and attack!"

One evening, when the pillbox garrison was having a cozy cup of coffee, a frightful blow on the barrels of the machine guns rang through the pillbox. Simultaneously the door flew open. Captain Serov's scouts burst into the pillbox with knives in their hands, barefoot and dripping. They had scaled the sheer cliff with the help of ropes and noiselessly wiped out the whole garrison.

Serov, a fearless young man and matchless scout, spent the night in this pillbox, and learned a great deal.

Thus, line after line of the Mius Front was entered on the maps of our staffs, and a picture of tremendous extent and depth was disclosed.

Four defence lines interconnected by endless communication trenches, chains of blockhouses and pillboxes along the whole front in length and depth, machine-gun nests and mobile artillery firing points, covering one another and spitting forth many-voiced fire, "crabs"—heavy migrating pillboxes of steel with a special apparatus regulating the inflow of air—trenches up forward, barbed wire entanglements and minefields, barriers both mobile and static—all this hellish mass of troops and materiel, screwed into the rock, dug into the earth, went by the name of the Mius Front.

## II

The war had gone underground.

Troops, guns, field kitchens, baths, radio stations and other services, motorized transports and baggage carts—all this, after appearing in countless quantity, disappeared into the ground. The front vanished from sight.

It grew quiet on the Mius.

The ground basked in the warming rays of the sun. The hillsides grew green and the apple trees in the abandoned orchards were already beginning to blossom. Nightingales sang on the banks of the Mius.

It was as if man had abandoned this wrinkled and rocky site with the sullen outlines of hills extending all the way to the sea. Not a soul or a movement could be discerned. The grass grew high and nettles took root. But this was only on the surface. Underground, life was pulsing and thriving. There, slowly but surely, painstaking preparations were being made for the blow at the Mius Front.

It was born in the sweat of the brow and the determination of our men. Day and night they dug into the ground.

Communication trenches and bunkers extended for hundreds of kilometres. It was possible to walk from the Azov Sea to Voroshilovgrad through the trenches of the forward fringe. The communication trenches began at Regimental Headquarters and ended at the outposts.

The units of Colonel Ptashkin's regiment were linked up by twenty kilometres of communication trenches, ten kilometres of first, second and third line trenches. Reinforcements coming to the regiment were specially drilled in the regulations governing traffic in the communication trenches.

Whole cities were created underground.

Highways were built to the front in three parallel rows. Broad tank roads were laid all the way to the Mius along the wrinkles in the ravine where only the water of spring floods had formerly found a way for itself, and every metre of these roads was skilfully camouflaged.

And a boundless sensation of strength filled the troops, a feeling that the spring belonged to us, that the sun shone for us, that even though the Mius Front was strong, still it could not take a single step forward, that the captive Donbas, the shackled Ukraine would be freed.

A good picture of the front of that time would be a bow with a tightly drawn string. And the string was drawn more tightly every day. It hummed like a violin string and the arrow vibrated on it ready to shoot forward like lightning. The men stared at the Mius and kept asking their commanders one and the same question:

"Soon?"

The zones grew in width and depth, and moved ever closer to the Germans. The men trained persistently and in great detail. The Stalingrad defences had their counterpart in staunchness along the whole length and breadth of this vast front.

The spirit of Stalingrad lived here.

And together with the tension, the silence increased on the front. It became tangible. The buzzing of a wasp in a dugout sounded like the screaming of a siren.

Snipers were on duty on either side.

The glint of a bayonet on one side evoked the bullet of a sniper from the other. It was a stubborn and titanic struggle for a sure blow, a perfect blow.

The Germans no longer shouted down from their fortifications. They were losing their self-possession. At night they kept up a furious fire from all arms.

Our lines were silent.

The ordeal of silence proved the most trying of ordeals. Our forward fringe kept moving ahead towards the Germans steadily, mutely, doggedly. An underground, trench offensive! Invisible hands with iron muscles seemed to be feeling for the throat of the Mius Front, clutching it and freezing in position, ready to strangle it in a death grip.

In several sectors our line crossed the Mius, and battering fists punched into the hard line of the Mius Front. One such sledgehammer blow was directed at the stomach of the Mius Front, which was subsequently called the "Little Stalingrad."

One night, under cover of an artillery barrage, Captain Kashper's Guards Battalion made a leap over to the other side of the Mius. It was a sudden and unexpected leap, accomplished with vigour and skill. The village of Dimitrievka was captured by the battalion and adapted for defence. The Stalingraders made a "Little Stalingrad" here. They settled in the ruins, bored into the rock and set up classical defences.

Only a few dozen metres separated the opposing sides.

Every day the Germans made a new attempt to crush the "Little Stalingrad." There were four bayonet encounters here. And after each German assault, machine-gunner Podymov, a broad-shouldered young man from

the Volga Region whose pillbox was in a spot where the fighting was hottest, would say:

"The Germans got all hot and bothered again. And all for nothing!"

And he would begin to make order among the effects of his pillbox: the machine gun, the niches with the grenades and fire bottles, the whole line of signal cords.

Far on the flank, on the crest of a little hill washed by the Mius, right against the sky, there was a scarcely noticeable mound—a pillbox, the outpost of "Little Stalingrad." Five Siberians kept watch there.

The men in the outpost were always on the watch—the pillbox was under constant fire of the Germans. Sergeant Major Sotnikov, the commandant of this tiny garrison, liked listening to the whirring of a wild duck's wings in flight and the whirring of a bullet reminded him of distant Siberia. . . .

The Mius Front could not move forward a single step. The broad shoulders of Stalingrad rose up in front of it, over the Mius.

### III

A General was sitting at the stereoscope in the observation point of Colonel Ptashkin, commander of a Guards rifle regiment.

Through it he could see the line of the Mius Front. The General compared it with a map bearing the notes of observers. The OP orderly reported on the squares and sectors of observation. Evidently the General was satisfied.

On leaving he gave orders to continue observations.

The clash was imminent, and the men felt it approaching as an oncoming thunderstorm. In the second echelon of the defences and directly behind the front, rifle companies and other units were undergoing assault training.

On the Mius Front, which merged with the eternal rock of hills and cliffs, there ripened, heavy and black as agate, the fruit of fear.

In the deep winding trenches of the 294th German Infantry Regiment, as in all the units of the front, officers were collecting "death subscriptions" from the men — written pledges that the particular soldier would not retreat, under threat of being shot, but would fight, would hold the Mius Front to his last breath. Feldwebel Karl Lautermilch had faith in Germany, in its army. In collecting these pledges from his men, he told them:

"Hoch! We'll make mincemeat of the Russians. The Mius Front is colossal!"

It was with the "Little Stalingrad" that active hostilities began. It was so daring and unexpected! The battles were terrific and unlike anything that had preceded them. The Germans sent their aircraft against the "Little Stalingrad." As many as one hundred and seven bombers unloaded simultaneously over this small sector. But the small sector began to spread, punching out with terrific force. The German trenches were filled to the very brim like silo pits with German dead. The population of the villages roundabout came out to bury this harvest of German corpses.



On the very first day of these battles, our forces saw the officers and men of the Mius Front—Germans deafened and deprived of the power of speech by our artillery. Entire battalion staffs, complete with commanders at their head, were taken prisoner.

The active operations of the "Little Stalingrad" had as their purpose to divert the enemy forces to itself, and to feel out the impending encounters.

For two weeks the "Little Stalingrad" battled on. And when its mission had been accomplished the "Little Stalingrad" fell silent.

Such was the situation until August 18.

The Germans should remember that date forever: August 18, 1943.  
06:00 hours Moscow time.

The night of the 17th was clear and moonlit.

The rocky outlines of the Mius Front (so familiar!) were illumined on this night by gigantic pyramid chandeliers, a hundred thousand candle-power each. They descended from the sky as from the enormous cupola of nature's cathedral. Their diametre increased near the ground to a radius of sixty metres. Their searing flame burst on the fortifications of the Mius Front, and century-old rock split asunder while the German steel melted at the incredible temperature. All night long massed light bombing aircraft kept releasing torrents of this fire on the Mius Front.

On this night every man was at his post, counting the minutes. And only the crawling sappers prayed the sun not to hurry in rising. Hugging the ground they drew the teeth of the forward fringe of the Mius Front: removed German mines and cleared lanes. An onslaught of invisible men! The crawling sappers penetrated the depths of the Mius Front: Sergeant Major Trubin, Sergeant Igonin and Corporal Korovin crawled six kilometres on their stomachs, reconnoitred, cleared away mines and H.E.'s on the tankroads in the depths of the Mius Front and put up their own signposts on them.

They returned and reported:

"The roads are good. . . ."

All night long forces kept coming up in the direction of the main drive, south of "Little Stalingrad."

The muzzles of the guns were trained on the Mius Front and only waiting for the signal.

At six the Guardsmen's mortars opened fire. The guns roared furiously and, gaining in tempo, began to pound and rake the Mius Front both over open sights and aimed in accordance with previously noted targets.

It grew dark. The light of day vanished just as if night had returned, as if the globe had suddenly turned back on its axis again and shaded this strip of land from the sun. The ground trembled with the impact of the fierce artillery blasts. Smoke and dust rose so high over the battlefield that flares could not penetrate it, could not pierce this mighty black wall reaching to the clouds.

Neither side could make use of light signals.

When the first sweep of Soviet planes made a run-up over the field, the bombers could not unload immediately, as neither the Red Army men nor the Germans were visible.

But in this inferno life went on, miraculous and never to be repeated. The infantry went over the top. Removing their helmets, the men embraced one another and became brothers forever. Black with smoke, their faces shone with joy as they shouted: "Hurrah!" drowning out the roar of hundreds of motors in the air and the booming of thousands of guns on the ground with their living, thousand-tongued voice.

Three Guards rifle platoons under Second Lieutenants Rubanov, Matvienko and Kashtuev bared their heads as they scrambled out of the trenches and repeated like an oath:

"Comrade Stalin, we are going over the top! We are pitching into the fight for the Donbas!"

Tommy-gunner Nikolai Kolykhalin struck up the "Internationale" and all the men joined in as they dashed forward in serried ranks.

Tanks, self-propelled guns and infantry fought furiously in the thundering black hell as they pressed forward to the fringe of the fiery artillery curtain.

Lieutenant Colonel Chernish's rifle regiment led the attack.

His battalion forced the Mius in the smoke and flame, clutching at every rock and pressing on to the first line of the Mius Front together with the tanks and self-propelled guns. This line was enveloped in flame. It blazed, smoked, flew upwards in a shower of earth and stone, but the Germans were still putting up a fight.

A fiery squall broke forth from the mysterious pillboxes of the Mius Front, which for two years had been silent in the midst of their heavily mined fields.

The 5th Company, under Lieutenant Eugene Sakk, crept through the smoke right up to the muzzles of these pillboxes and struck the first grenade blow. First Lieutenant Smirnov and his glorious 4th Company also attacked the pillboxes. But their position would have been far from enviable if the anti-tank gun platoons had not given them support. Their commander, First Lieutenant Balashov, wounded and drenched in blood, led his men forward until their guns were muzzle to muzzle with those of the German pillboxes.

For more than two hours this battle of tanks, self-propelled guns and infantry raged and waxed against the German pillboxes of the first line.

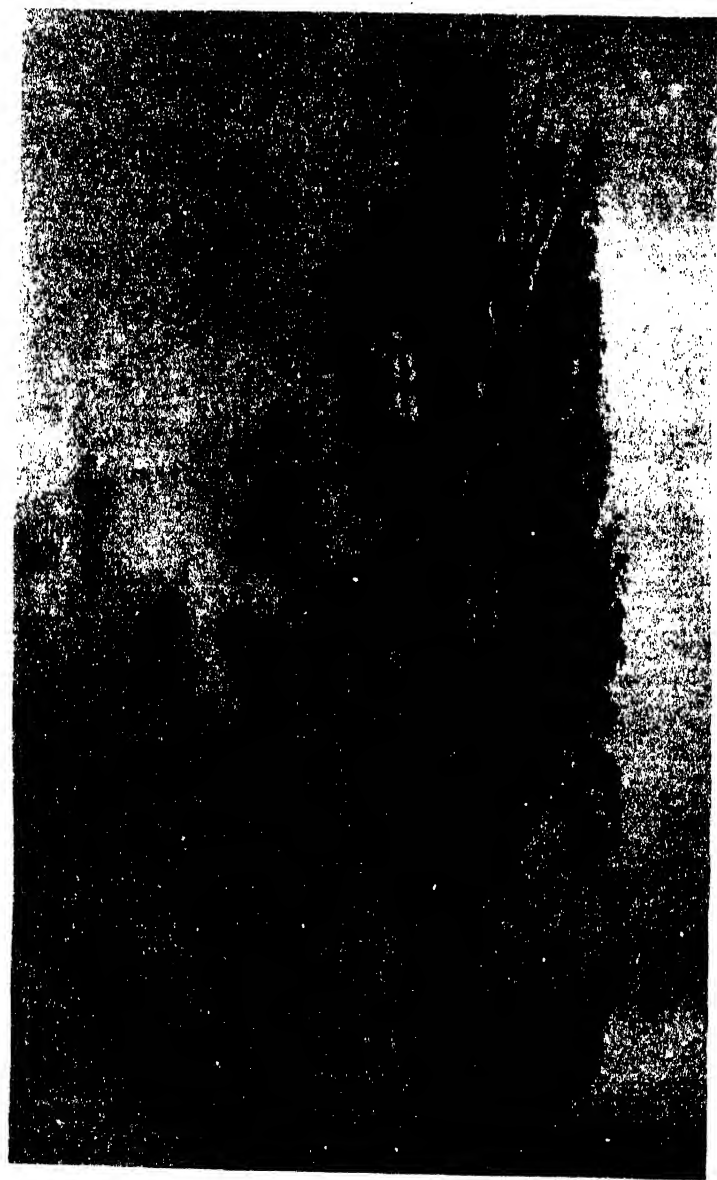
And the Mius Front cracked.

Fresh forces flung themselves into the breach and pressed onward to the second line. . . .

#### IV

Russia is boundless, but the men felt the battering ram growing within the country, felt the incalculable force coming from there.

Our planes covered the sky as more and more of them came up. The infantry fought under the wings of their own planes, which spread over them like a blessing, as an eaglet under the wing of its mother. The aircraft unloaded in the depths of the Mius Front, where bloody battles were seething. Whole fleets of bombers hovered over the Germans,



**WESTWARD**

*Pen and Ink Drawing by Nikolai Zhukov*



**TOMMY-GUNNER**

*Oil Painting by Pavel Sokolov-Skatya*

and air squadrons zoomed as they dived low in mass formation, smoothly and all together, so that it seemed as if the very skies were falling.

Fighting raged at close quarters, only a short space separating the two sides, but our aircraft released their bomb loads with amazing accuracy.

Before the attack began, Sergeant Major Ruban received a letter from his brother, a fighter pilot. In this letter, the airman told his brother that he would be fighting together with him to recapture the Donbas. Now every time a flight of fighters streaked overhead, the Sergeant Major would shout:

"I'm here, brother! . . . Lend us a hand, old chap! . . ."

And this call soared over the field of battle, rousing among the men an untold feeling of love for their native land.

Waves of tanks, self-propelled guns and infantry—now Russian, now German—surged over the broad battlefield. It looked as if the very earth were shattering. Only the weight of coordinated effort on the part of all arms could smash the Germans. Here it was not the heroic exploits of individual fighting men that were required but of combined forces.

Fourteen times First Lieutenant Chumachenko's Guards rifle company attacked, and fifteen times the Germans counter-attacked. Chumachenko saw that his company was in mortal danger and that the German defences might not be breached.

He sent for Sergeant Major Andreyichev, Sergeant Major Meleshkin, Sergeant Saranin and Lance-Sergeant Semyonov, and when they appeared said to them:

"The company is being wiped out, my friends. There's no point to letting such a thing happen. We must save the situation. I'm going to join the Communist Party."

And his friends followed his example and likewise applied for membership.

Then Chumachenko announced to his men that a Party branch had been formed in the company, and that the Communists would take their places where the danger was greatest.

For the fifteenth time the company attacked. Communist Meleshkin advanced with a party of men to a ravine into which the Germans had lowered their self-propelled guns. Meleshkin never returned, but the self-propelled guns did not utter another sound. Andreyichev, Saranin and Semyonov led their men in a bayonet charge. Saranin was killed, Semyonov wounded, but the Party branch lived on and new Communists led the assaulting ranks.

The Germans sent heavy tanks carrying mobile infantry assault groups on special armoured trailers against the company. The Red Armymen stood their ground. They were already ensconced in the last line of German trenches. When a tank drawing a trailer rumbled over his trench, Private Belayev, a shock-headed, grey-eyed lad, jumped out at the tank and with grenades and tommy-gun fire wiped out the whole enemy assault group to a man.

The company set fire to the remaining German panzers and routed the assault groups.

Step by step, blow by blow, day and night, Soviet tanks and infantry ate into the Mius Front. And again the time came when our aircraft could not unload on the first line targets as both sides were clinched in a single struggling mass without bound or demarcation. The pillboxes and fortifications were abandoned.

That was on August 22.

It looked as if both sides must perish in this encounter.

The scales were evenly balanced.

Battered and bruised, one rifle company pushed ahead of the others. This company was under the thrice-wounded company Party organizer, Sergeant Major Zainulin. His men had not slept for four days. They could hardly keep on their feet.

But a single instant could turn the scales in their favour, just one instant!

This was at night. The company held a captured sector at the foot of a hill. The Germans kept slogging away at the company with fierce mortar fire, but the sector was invulnerable. It was at the same time an excellent springboard for an attack. But in the morning the company's position was indeed deplorable. The Germans had drawn up reinforcements.

With bayonets fixed, the company dashed forward.

The spirit of the men was not to be daunted. They recalled Stalingrad and seemed to penetrate into the future. They did not think of death, they ignored it. The heroism of thousands held sway on the battlefield, for this was a field of glory.

Heroes require no praise.

They have known more than praise.

They fought without a thought for what fate held in store for them.

Pyotr Kuprianov, Party organizer in a machine-gun company, pushed his way far ahead with his machine gun, clearing the way for the attacking forces. On the outskirts of the village of Gavrilovka, the Germans cut him off. Kuprianov had been wounded in both arms, but he marched with firm step to the wall against which his life was destined to end.

The local inhabitants were out on the village street.

"Comrades!" said Kuprianov to them in a loud clear voice. "I am a Communist and I want to tell you that our forces will be here soon. Your days of slavery will be over! In three days the whole Donbas will be ours again and for all time! . . ."

Dying, officers ordered their men to keep moving forward.

"I'm done for, mates," said Company Commander Weiner to the men who were supporting him in their arms. "My last will and order is that you continue to advance. You must hold nothing dearer than the liberation of our native land."

The men were aflame for battle and victory. With their hearts they set fire to the Mius Front.

General Kirichenko's Kuban Cossack Guardsmen had been concentrating for several days in the marshes and valleys amidst the vast steppeland around the Sea of Azov, and in the dried-up river beds. The Cossacks were resting after their winter march, the horses pawing the ground impatiently, snorting and tossing their manes.

General Tanaschishin's tankmen were already at the assembly position. They were waiting for the signal.

At night rousing songs and boisterous whistling could be heard along the banks of the Mius where the front had been breached—the Cossack cavalry were galloping into the breach on the heels of General Tanaschishin's tanks and the glorious infantry that were driving a spearhead into the depths of the enemy's defences.

A heavy maze of dust hung over the cavalry.

The Cossacks bathed their mounts in the Mius—the first water zone of the Donbas, crimsoned with the sacred blood of our fighting men.

Swords flashed at the wide breach and vanished from sight in the broad operative expanse, in the enemy rear.

The Cossacks swept with irresistible vehemence over the steppes of the Azov Sea region. In clouds of dust they broke through to hamlets and villages, striking terror into the hearts of the enemy, wrecking enemy headquarters, capturing transports and bringing their swords down on the heads of the terror-crazed Germans. With lightning speed, fighting flared up first in one place then in another, and invariably the Cossacks emerged the victors. And together with them advanced the tanks and mobile infantry of General Tanaschishin.

This breakthrough was so vigorous that the enemy was unable to organize his forces. Only the day before they had been repelling attacks from the East alone, but now they were obliged to encounter attacks from the North and from the West as well.

The Germans were powerless to ward off the collapse of their front. Our cavalry and tanks captured over one hundred and fifty populated places, among them Veselo-Voznesensk, which is on the shore of the Sea of Azov.

The ring of death was tightening around the Mius Front. The Stalingrad ring! The complete destruction of the Mius Front had begun.

## V

The fate of the Donbas lay in the hands of each and every Red Armyman. And if he were not a Stalingrader, in the course of those days he became one.

The Mius Front wavered. The whole structure was tottering. The "iron doors" of which the Germans had boasted had been forced open, and through them flooded ever new reserves, pushing forward in depth and towards the South, to the mouth of the Mius.

The time had come to strike a blow at the Mius Front head-on.

The 130th and 416th Rifle Divisions entered the field. They struck out simultaneously at Taganrog and at the watch towers of the Mius Front, the Sambek Hills.

For four days and four nights fighting raged.

The Sambek Hills, thrust forward like a giant spur, were cut off from Taganrog by the western bank of the Mius just where they began. The noose of the enveloping move was drawn around the massive neck of the protuberance. At 4:00 a.m. on August 30 Lieutenant Colonel Kizyurov's rifle regiment launched a frontal assault on Taganrog.

It was then that the ring in the hinterland of the Mius Front at the mouth of the Mius closed.

The Mius Front was smashed.

It collapsed all along the line and the enemy forces on this front were trapped in a ring of fire and water.

On August 30, 1943, the sun rose never to be dimmed again. The dead, razed bulk of the Mius Front, that fiendish creation of the savages of the twentieth century, was numb and cold.

That day Taganrog rejoiced at the return of the sun. Old time Taganrog workers and fishermen met Lieutenant Colonel Kizyurov's men with bread and salt. This was a moment that testified to the eternity of Russian customs, to the eternity of all the good old Russian ways.

An old fisherman bowed to the men and handed the bread and salt to the commander.

In his turn Lieutenant Colonel Kizyurov bowed low to the people, and reverently accepting the bread and salt he raised it to his mouth carefully so as not to drop a single crumb.

The old man embraced Kizyurov, and as he did so whispered in his ear:

"You have taken unto yourself strength from the people, son. . . ."

Jumping into his saddle, Kizyurov galloped off, rich in the knowledge of his own and the people's happiness.

The wall of the Mius Front had fallen.

The road to the Donbas lay open and now nothing could stop the victorious advance of the Soviet fighting men.

Columns of German war prisoners wound along the dusty roads. They shuffled along gloomily, dully, limply. Among them was Feldwebel Karl Lautermilch. Out of his head, he kept muttering over and over to himself:

"The Mius Front—colossal! . . . The Mius Front—colossal! . . ."

Ahead lay the broad expanses of the Donbas, the heart of the Ukraine.

The Germans were rolling back to the West. They tried to stop their retreat by putting up a resistance in towns and villages. But the huge Southern Front followed hot on their heels and lightning blows showered down on the Germans before they could halt.

One after the other the towns of the Donbas were freed. Their fair Russian names and life of liberty returned to them.



Six days galloped past like spirited steeds. And in six days the Donbas was returned to the country.

Millions of people were set free from German bondage.

Soviet divisions were met with tears of joy. These encounters will leave a deep trace in the history of the Soviet people. In the course of these six days the noble traits of the soul of the Soviet individual were manifested with particular force—the traits of friendship, love, and loyalty to home and country.

The Germans tried to make a stand in Stalino, the capital of the Donbas, tried to destroy it, to wipe it from the face of the earth.

Here too they were smashed, on the last sector of the Donbas.

The Soviet divisions that brought life and honour back to the cities of the Donbas won for themselves a high award—the right to bear the name of the cities they had liberated.

Eternal memory and eternal glory to the fallen! Eternal glory to the living!



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K. SIMONOV

## THE BRIDGE UNDER THE WATER



It was late autumn. In a clearing in the forest, nipped by the first frosts, sappers were putting the finishing touches to a rather queer looking construction. Had there been a river here it might, at a stretch, have passed for a bridge. But there was no river here, only a forest glade. And yet the seven pairs of piles jutting out of the ground looked like the bridge supports in a river just before the roadway is put in place. The piles were spaced at regular intervals of three feet. To the layman this in itself would have seemed strange enough, but stranger still was the fact that tanks had driven up to them and that the crews were eyeing the structure with a long and critical gaze.

Divisional Engineer Sosnovkin and Tank Commander Yevlev walked round the piles slowly, subjecting them to a close scrutiny. Apparently satisfied with what he saw, Yevlev ordered the first of the tanks assembled in the glade to cross over the parallel rows of piles. The heavy machine clambered onto the first pair of piles and then crawled slowly from the first to the second, the revolving caterpillars bridging the three-foot gaps between them. In this way the tank continued moving from pair to pair, crossing safely to the opposite end of the glade as over an ordinary bridge. After the first tank, the same manoeuvre was repeated by a second tank, then by a third, and then by all the other tanks in turn.

There was something funny about the whole thing—the piles driven in the ground in this forest glade, the tanks with seemingly nothing better to occupy themselves with in the midst of a war than crawling over these piles, and, particularly, the posts that had been set up on either side of the piles—like the posts one sees at the roadsides of any well-kept highway—as if without them the tankmen could not see where the pile ended and where empty space began.

And strangest of all, both Sosnovkin and Yevlev, the sappers and the tankmen, in short, all the participants in this unusual game, were terribly serious about the whole thing and seemed highly pleased with the results.

After negotiating this overland bridge, the tankmen inspected it once again, discussing it among themselves animatedly; then, climbing into their tanks, they disappeared one after the other into the depths of the forest. Yevlev patted Sosnovkin on the back, and with a note of satisfaction in his voice observed that it was "fine," and added:

"If you do your part of the job, you can rely on us to follow suit."

October was drawing to a close with its last dry, crisp autumn days. Things were quiet at the front, and in the forest glade only the dull rumble of an occasional artillery salvo, carried here by the wind, served to remind one of its presence.

That day a serious hindrance to the forthcoming offensive had been satisfactorily overcome in the forest clearing. On this sector of the Central Front, which had become stabilized ever since August, a river lay between the Soviet and German forces. Now the average Russian river is not exceptionally wide, but even so it is wide enough and deep enough for a tank to be unable to get across. And it was this difficulty that had had to be overcome in order to ensure a successful breakthrough.

When General Mukhin had received orders to prepare for the offensive, he had summoned Engineer Sosnovkin and said:

"You'll have to provide a crossing for our tanks, but. . ." the General paused significantly, "in the first place, the bridge over the river will have to be erected before we launch our offensive and not in the course of it and, secondly, it is preferable that the Germans should have no inkling as to where we propose to cross or that we are even contemplating such a thing."

Sosnovkin had asked for twenty-four hours in which to find a solution to this seemingly unsolvable problem. The Divisional Engineer was a man of wide experience but in all his engineering practice he had never been confronted with such a dilemma as this. During those twenty-four hours scores of the most fantastic possibilities had flitted through his mind, but he had been obliged to reject them one after the other for the very reason that they were too fantastic. At last, in the early hours of the morning, when his nerveless fingers were rolling what must have been his hundredth cigarette, he had suddenly hit on a solution, the one solution as he realized in a flash, and—so simple, oh, too simple for words, simple to the point of downright boldness.

When he reported to the General, Sosnovkin announced that he had found a solution, that he would build a bridge, a very ordinary bridge in every respect, except for two—only two—peculiarities. In the first place, his bridge would not be one continuous stretch, but would have spaces in it, and, secondly, this bridge of his would span the river not above the surface, but below the surface. In fact, this bridge that he suggested would have three-foot gaps between the piers. True, it would not be traversable for infantry, but tanks would have no difficulty in getting across. Further, the existence of this bridge would be known only to our men and would come

as a surprise to the Germans. It would be invisible inasmuch as the tops of the supports would be half a yard below the water level.

Sosnovkin's proposal was accepted, and work on it began full swing at two different spots in the woods. Logs were felled for two bridges—an experimental bridge for the tankmen to train on in the woods, and the real bridge which would eventually span the river.

While the sappers in the woods, setting to with a will, were felling and planing and measuring the logs, Sosnovkin settled down in one of the outposts of the battalion holding the line on our side of the river, opposite the spot where the proposed bridge was to be built. From this vantage point the Divisional Engineer made a thorough study of the situation. The bank held by our forces, like the left bank of most Russian rivers and streams, was low-lying and sloped only gently. On the other hand, the right bank on which the Germans were ensconced was high and steep, and in the daytime the enemy commanded an excellent view of everything that went on in the Red Army lines.

Every single night the Germans, true to their methodical routine, would shower the left bank with tracer bullets from their high bank. The bullets would whizz over our trenches, smack into the river bank, or plop into the water with a hiss. The Germans made full use of their vantage point and kept our bank under constant observation. To build a bridge here in the daytime was out of the question, and to build it even at night would be no easy matter—the right bank was too high and too steep, and any sign of activity on our side would immediately attract the attention of the enemy.

But how could the logs be transported to the river, how could they be brought to the spot where they would be required without being seen by the enemy? Sosnovkin deliberated over this problem long and patiently, and finally a happy thought occurred to him. Yes, of course, the Germans had a clear view of our side of the river from their bank. Well, in that case the thing to do was to get the logs down not from our side but from their side of the river.

The steep, overhanging bank which gave the Germans their present advantage would hinder them from seeing what was going on under their very noses, on the strip of beach fringing the water's edge on their side of the river.

At one spot the river made a sharp bend, and just here a deep gully on our side went straight down to the river. It would be possible to assemble the logs here without being noticed, get them across the river and then float them downstream to the spot where it was proposed to build the bridge. Yes, that was what had to be done—the logs would have to be floated down the river under the very noses of the Germans, along their own bank. That was the only way.

In the meantime the tank crews tested the experimental bridge in the forest clearing. Sosnovkin had made an exact model of the bridge that would cross the river. It was true to the last detail—breadth, length, down to the very posts which later on, a quarter of an hour before the offensive began, he would personally plant in the river bed on either side of the bridge. He even tested here, on dry land, the tricky little device which made this bridge of his a one-way bridge—passable only from east to west and impassable

from west to east. At one end of the bridge a graded, pebbly approach would enable the tanks to mount the first pair of piles with ease, while at the opposite end the piles would break off abruptly, with no grade leading up to them. Although this would not prevent the tanks from coming down on the further bank, it would be impossible for tanks to mount the bridge without the aid of such an approach, so as to cross from west to east. Thus even if the Germans chanced to discover the bridge before time, they would be unable to use it themselves. As for our own tankmen, the one thought that occupied their minds was to cross the river to the enemy bank. Getting back did not interest them in the slightest.

It took the sappers two days to prepare the logs and cut them down to beams of the proper size. Usually such beams for supports are fastened together with cramp irons. In the present circumstances this was out of the question. The sappers would have to work in the river at night without a sound, and all hammering, of course, was definitely ruled out. Sosnovkin's orders were to fit the beams together with bolts and screws, and to see to it that the job was done quietly and neatly. Good Russian carpenters have always had a penchant for cabinet making and neat workmanship, and it was precisely this art that was required of them in the present instance.

It was now the beginning of November and the nights were pitch dark. The sky was completely veiled with heavy black clouds, through which not a glimmer or a star showed.

Elementary caution demanded that the very minutest details be carefully considered and provided for beforehand. For instance, the usual methods of marking beams with pencil, chalk or charcoal were useless in the present circumstances. In order to see such markings in the dark so as to ensure putting the beams in their proper places, a lamp or at least a match would have to be lit and this, at a distance of a hundred and fifty yards from the Germans, was absolutely taboo. A whole system of notches had to be elaborated so that the men could tell by touch which beam was which and where it had to go.

On the third night Sosnovkin, together with Kayurov, commander of the company of sappers, and Bikov, the latter's assistant, set to work building the bridge. It was bitterly cold even for late autumn and a thin crust of ice had begun to form on the water. Dragging the beams across towards the opposite bank up to the neck in water and then propelling them downstream in front of one called for exceptional grit, even from men who were inured to the coldest weather.

The icy water cut like a knife. The one thought uppermost in the men's minds was to float the beams to their destination as quickly as possible and then to return as quickly as possible in order to warm up at least a bit round a campfire. All haste, however, was strictly prohibited. The slightest lack of caution, the tiniest splash, might ruin everything. Two men guided each beam through the water. And after them came others, moving just as cautiously downstream along the German bank, carrying stones with which to make a firm bedding for the piles. Extra special precautions were taken by the men carrying the stones so that, God forbid, not a single pebble should splash into the water.

The first night's work saw two pairs of piles set fast in the river bed. In the light of the day they were invisible both to us and to the Germans. The next night two more pairs were driven in, and the night after that the last three.

On each of these nights bullets had whizzed and whined over the men's heads. The Germans kept this stretch of the river under fire regularly, as they did the rest of the bank, "just on the off-chance." There were a number of casualties among the sappers. Both the dead and the wounded were carried back with the same care and precaution as had been shown with regard to the rest of the work.

Night after night the water became steadily colder. The surface was now no longer dotted with small patches of ice crust but covered with an unbroken sheet of thin, crackly ice, which cut the men's hands like razor blades. Their feet became so numbed that in the morning, back once more in their dugouts, even vodka could not warm the frozen and shivering men.

And yet, despite everything, at the close of the third night all seven pairs of piles had been driven into the river bed, strong, sturdy, embedded in stones and—most important of all—absolutely invisible. The last night was so cold that by morning the whole river was covered with a solid sheet of ice.

"Just managed in time," the Divisional Engineer thought to himself. "Another day or two and we'd have been too late."

Time dragged slowly in anticipation of the order to launch the offensive. Nobody knew the exact day or hour when it would begin. As the river became ice-bound Sosnovkin watched the lowering water level with an anxious eye. He had, of course, made special allowances for this in his calculations, and the piles were considerably below the surface of the water at its lowest level. But what if the river dropped to an unprecedentedly low level? After all, nature was full of such caprices. Still, he had foreseen even such an extreme possibility. All he had to do, should the emergency arise and the water level drop still lower, was to slice off the tops of the piles. This could be done in one night.

At last, the long-awaited order was received. At night Sosnovkin, accompanied by a group of sappers, crept down to the river and, drilling holes in the ice, inserted the previously prepared posts on either side of the bridge. It was now a regular roadway and the tanks could push straight across it, without straying, just as the offensive required.

And at dawn, when our tanks drove straight onto the river to the thunder of hundreds of guns, and the ice, to the astonishment of the Germans, did not give way as it should have done according to all the laws of physics, in front of the formidable machines, leading the way, walked a stocky little man in a khaki trenchcoat—Divisional Engineer Sosnovkin—the builder of the underwater bridge.



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NIKOLAI STAROSTIN

## PARATROOPERS



RED rocket ripped the closely knit darkness of the starless night. The signal for the take-off. The roaring, flapping darkness streamed into action. One after the other, at short but regular intervals, the heavy airships taxied out for the take-off. Red and green stars—the port and starboard lights—moved into the distance in pairs, rose aloft, gained altitude, wheeled round the aerodrome as if in farewell salute, then set off on their course: due West.

That day's sweep was not an ordinary one. The planes were crowded with men in white coveralls, and each "passenger" had a parachute and heavy haversack over his shoulders.

Somehow the men acted differently. A heightened keenness in the young faces betrayed their restlessness, but all of them restrained their excitement. They kept looking out at the dense black wall of the night sky as it rushed past them. For most of them this was their first operational flight.

The Flight Officer repeated the mission to the men again. It was a difficult and responsible assignment.

In the vicinity of the village that we shall call Luchi, there were two highways linking the German front with the rear. From the Southwest the Nazis brought up ammunition and fuel along the railway, and from the North they drew up men and supplies. This area was strongly fortified.

The well-known Soviet General B. was waging an offensive on this sector of the front. He was pressing the Nazi forces hard, driving them West. It was necessary to help him by pounding the enemy from the rear, pounding the enemy without giving him a moment's respite.

The men were informed of the sweep that day in the morning. They were called to readiness, told to receive ammunition, rations and underwear, and pack their haversacks. Everyone was excited, jubilantly impatient, expectant. Soon the Colonel showed up and after greeting us he asked:

"Well, boys, are you ready for the sweep behind the enemy line?"

"Everything's in order," replied Private Ivanov.

"Splendid," said the Colonel. And then he gave the men their orders.

Soon explosions began to flicker below. Flashes appeared close by and just as quickly faded. That was German flak.

Suddenly dead rays of light came through the window. An enemy searchlight had caught the plane. The explosions began to come much thicker and faster, and much closer. The searchlight beam never left the cabin. The dancing rays picked tense blue faces out of the darkness. Immediately the pilot deadened the engine and the plane slid down. The searchlight was already groping somewhere behind, and along the cone of light a long many coloured chain-like snake was crawling, tracer bullets from ack-ack guns.

A few minutes later and the line of the front was well behind. Soon the men would be getting down to their job.

Lieutenant Batenko, Flight Officer, looked around at the men sitting in the cabin.

Closest to the pilot was Private Beznogov. Restlessly, he kept getting up and sitting down again, but he never once stopped staring out of the window. Batenko could understand him. Beznogov's mother and little sister had remained in Nazi-occupied territory, in the district to which he was flying. Were they still alive? Would he get the chance to see them? . . .

Then there was the husky, thick-set, ever calm and silent Alexei Lashin.

"You've got a tough job before you, Alexei," thought Batenko. "But everything'll come out pat. That's right, isn't it, Alexei? You're just the right sort for a scout."

Right near the door paratrooper Andreyev was dozing. He didn't look a day over eighteen. A smile spread over Batenko's broad face as he recalled the history of this "small-calibre paratrooper."

When volunteers for a parachute landing were called for, Andreyev went to the commission together with his friends. He was rejected as unfit. Andreyev was terribly put out and offended: what did they mean unfit? He had taken third and fourth place for his home town of Ivanovo more than once in district ski meets. He had never come back from a hunting trip empty-handed, and now he was suddenly "unfit."

He began a heated argument with the doctor to pass him for the airborne troops.

"Look here, I'll be anything you like, even cook at first. I've been working at that job for four years already."

And that is how it was decided. It helped his case that there was no cook among the men who had been accepted as fit.

Crowded training days began. Andreyev prepared breakfast, fed the men and dashed off to training practice.

The boys used to jump from parachute towers, and he would try to persuade them to give him their turns. When he didn't succeed, he would



just slip up unnoticed and jump. He learned on his own how to pack his parachute and manage it.

Then one day orders came for a sortie. No one knew that this was a training flight.

That day Andreyev worked with particular zeal and had supper ready even sooner than usual, leaving the distribution to his assistant.

He was on the field before any of the others with his parachute on his back. No one could look at him without smiling. He looked just like a walking suitcase. Only the heels of his boots and the top of his head were visible from behind the parachute.

Then Andreyev disappeared. At roll call he was missing. At that moment he was already sitting in a plane: an "air stowaway."

And when the door was opened for the men to bale out, he was the first to jump, evidently fearing that at the last moment someone would be sure to stop him.

He was the first to jump, but the last to land. The fact of the matter was that he was hanging on the branches between two fir trees. And when between fits of laughter his mates asked him how it had happened, Andreyev tried to justify himself in embarrassment, insisting that he had got hold of a defective parachute. He did not want to admit that he was so light that his parachute came down almost as if it had no load.

At first they wanted to punish the cook severely for what he had done, but Brigade Commissar Olenin ordered that he be bawled out for acting on his own hook, but included among the paratroopers for his boldness. And now although Andreyev considered himself a regular paratrooper, he nevertheless sat as close as he could to the door just to make sure.

The pilot eased up on the gas and began to come down. The plane veered round sharply and the command rang out to get ready. The navigator opened the door, and the "stowaway," just as if he were afraid that even here the doctor might stop him, jumped out first. One after the other the parachutists baled out after Andreyev. As they fell they straightened their straps, and turned their parachute tops so that they would catch the wind. Below big white fields stretched. Against their background the dense black woods stood out distinctly.

The sky had cleared up and it was growing light. The dots separating from the planes were visible for a long distance. The wind was driving the parachutes with great force.

Hearing the roar of Soviet aircraft, the Nazis rushed out of the houses in a panic, thinking that they were due for the usual bombing. But when they looked up into the sky, they realized that a landing was being made.

Senior Political Officer Zdanovsky noticed that small black spots were slowly spreading out along the ground in the direction of his parachute's drift. Keeping his eyes fixed on the ground below him, he saw that the spots were drawing closer. Who were they, Soviet people or the Nazis?

He could already make out the long, stoop-shouldered figures of men with automatic rifles on the ready. There was no doubt about it, those were

Nazis below. Most likely they were not firing because they wanted to take him alive. The parachute was heading straight for them. Glancing around hurriedly, Zdanovsky saw that his comrades were coming down a considerable distance to the south, near the edge of the woods. He began to bear in their direction too, but too slowly, too late.

With great difficulty he thrust his hand through his belt strap. At last he succeeded in getting hold of a grenade. A "pocket artillery" began to fire from the sky. The Germans had evidently not expected such offerings from above and had kept together in a bunch. Four of them were writhing on the ground in their death agonies.

There was the ground. But now Zdanovsky was not overly pleased at changing the aerial ocean for *terra firma*.

A party of Germans rushed for the Soviet parachutist. He could see ropes in their hands. Seemed they wanted to take him alive at all costs.

What was he to do? At first it flashed into Zdanovsky's mind to dig in hastily and defend himself by firing. But then he felt that the north wind had begun to blow harder and the parachute was flapping around him like a sail.

"The parachute won't collapse," flashed through his mind. This was an excellent way out of a difficult situation. A sharp gust of wind tore the ground from under his feet, caught up the parachute and dragged it towards the woods.

The Germans opened fire at this unusual mobile target. The parachute was being carried along quickly at an altitude of five to seven metres from the ground. spurts of tommy-gun fire flashed from the sparkling clouds of snowdust swirling after it. Zdanovsky was returning the German fire as he was being dragged along on his back.

From the outskirts of the woods shots cracked. The paratroopers who had come down were covering the landing of their comrade. They could see the fix that Zdanovsky was in, could see the Nazis drawing closer to him through the deep snow as they tracked their light prey, and the paratroopers who had just come down from the wing, so to speak, hastened to his rescue.

When he reached them, they seized the trailing edge of the parachute and helped him to unfasten the harness and free himself. He was half lying on his back with his head raised and a tommy gun in his hand. Jumping to his feet as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, he shook himself and smiled as he said painfully through cracked lips:

"Well, here I am, said the old woman as she fell from the fourth floor."

"That was pretty good," said one of the men. "The Nazis went off without anything."

"What do you mean, without anything?" blurted out Andreyev, who had been silent until now. "They went off with the rope and now they'll drag their four carcasses away with it."

"I say, Zdanovsky," said Batenko with a smile as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, "it's a mistake you being in the paratroopers. You should be a sailor, and on a sailboat at that. Looks like the wind's always with you."

"The wind's going to be with all of us, Comrade Lieutenant," interposed Alexei Lashin, and a mischievous spark flashed in his sleepy eyes. "We only have to be able to throw a grenade in time and fire from a tommy gun, and then the wind'll always help. As the saying goes: Put your trust in the wind, but don't spare your tommy-gun fire. . . ."

More and more paratroopers were gathering on the outskirts of the woods and the unit grew. The Germans were sending up rockets over the village without a stop.

Withdrawing further into the woods, the paratroopers began to form squads. There was no time to lose. While the Nazis had not recovered from their surprise or drawn up reserves, they had to drive them out of the village and capture it.

The road to Luchi began at this village.

The paratroopers made ready for battle.

The village of Luchi had a complete command over the surrounding terrain. From the air it looked like a huge saddle. Several roads led out of Luchi, connecting this strongly fortified place with the big garrison guarding the approaches to an extremely important highway. It was over this highway that the Germans were bringing up reserves to their front, which at that time was beginning to crack in many places.

There were approximately five hundred German soldiers, an artillery battery, several mortar batteries and heavy machine guns in Luchi. A dense network of communication trenches had been dug all around the village. Pillboxes had been set up in the cellars of the houses, while a network of snipers and tommy-gunners had been skillfully disposed on the roofs.

The paratroopers knew that it would not be easy to capture this strongly fortified place. But it had to be taken. General B. was already on his way from the East to join them.

The commander of the paratroopers set that night for the assault. It was decided to attack from all sides after making a wide detour through the woods into the German rear.

Two red rockets gave the signal for the attack. The heroic fight to capture the German strongpoint had begun. The Nazis stubbornly resisted the onslaught of the paratroopers, making the most of their superiority in fire power.

At dawn, after a night of heavy fighting, a new group of airborne troops came up and in the same way plunged straight into the battle. By evening the men had already succeeded in outflanking the enemy from the East and infiltrating into the German rear. Once again a heavy blow was struck at the enemy from a direction where the enemy least expected it. Fighting began for every gun nest, for every house, for every roof.

Everything developed just as it should have in a parachute landing operation: the enemy was on all sides. In this respect the Soviet paratroopers were not met by any unforeseen or unexpected contingencies. Only a few

months previously, our men, finding themselves in the rear of the Germans, would have considered that they were surrounded. They would have fought grimly and fiercely, but their psychology would be nothing like what it was among the paratroopers now.

Kazankin, the gallant commander of the airborne troops, had good reason to repeat, as he always did:

"We are flying from the sky to surround the Germans."

Some time after the events we have just described, a radiogram addressed to Kazankin and Commissar Olenin was received at the Command Point from General Zhukov, Commander of the Western Front:

"Today an Ukase of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet has been published, conferring the Order of the Red Banner on you. Hearty congratulations on this high government award and best wishes for further success in the heroic work of the airborne forces."

The same day Kazankin told his men:

"Our hard work has been very highly commended. My award is our award. Let's go, friends!"

This took place later, after the paratroopers had accomplished a great part of their main mission in spite of all difficulties, and there were many of them. Right now heavy fighting was still raging for Luchi.

Surgeon Abusaid Valievich Issayev, chief of the medical service, never left his detachment even when it was storming Luchi. Lieutenant Petrov, a great friend of the doctor's, was up front with an advance group. Before the hostilities had begun, he had said to Issayev as he ran past:

"If anything happens, I want you to know that I won't let anyone cut me up but you."

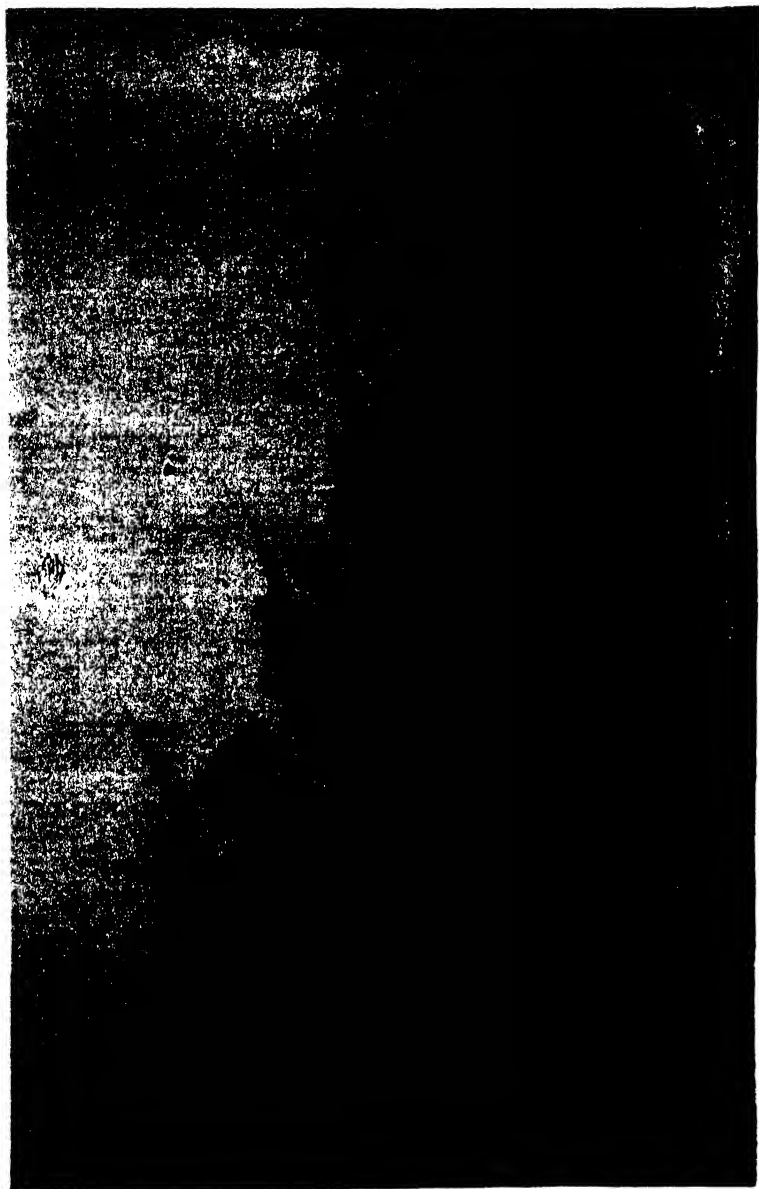
"Don't worry," Issayev had shouted after him, "my hand will be steady."

When the two end houses, which stood on a rising, had been captured from the Nazis and the men were pushing further, Issayev decided to set up a first-aid station in one of them immediately. Taking three orderlies he went into the big smoke-stained room. Only a few minutes previously the Nazis had been master here. Filthy rags and torn ersatz boots were strewn on the floor. Under the little icon in the corner pornographic postcards had been put up with thumb tacks. On the table lay a pass to a house of prostitution.

The orderlies quickly took down the bunks that the Germans had built and began to fix up an operating table. Just then the windowframe flew out with a crash. A mortar bomb had burst in the house. Issayev was wounded by a splinter in the side. With the help of the orderlies he began to dress the wound, but lost consciousness before finishing the job.

"What rotten luck, to happen just at this time!" he barely managed to murmur.

Judging by appearances few people would have said this man was a doctor. He looked much more like a combatant officer. Smart and vigorous, he was just the same here too, in the enemy rear. Since he had been in the army, he had made over seventy parachute jumps and was an instructor in parachute jumping.



OVER THE BRIDGE

*Pencil Drawing by Alexander Deineka*



SIGNALMEN

*Pencil Drawing by I. Zhurukhin*

Before the war, in addition to his work as a surgeon, Issayev had helped to train parachutists. And now no few hundred of his pupils were plummeting down from the sky on the Germans in an "air spearhead."

Sometimes a young man or girl going up for the first time to jump with a parachute would be a little afraid and hesitate. Issayev would point to his parachutist badge and say to them:

"Look here, I've jumped seventy times, and still I'm not afraid, and you're afraid of jumping once."

Clapping the youngster on the shoulder affectionately, he would continue with feigned severity:

"Come on, now, go ahead, go ahead. Everything will be all right. I'll jump first and you follow me."

And immediately their fear would evaporate. The doctor's big black eyes seemed to command obedience with their confident, calm power.

... Issayev was lying on the floor unconscious. The orderlies quickly finished dressing his wound and carried him into the next room, carefully putting him down on the table. One of them hastily put the room to rights, boarding up the smashed window. Meanwhile the others were already receiving the wounded. They made simple dressings, but more than that consoled and cheered up the men.

"Whatever will we do without the doctor?" exclaimed Vasya, a young medical orderly.

"Never mind, brother, this isn't Moscow or the 'big front.' You can't call up a hospital from here. Whoever we jump with will have to do the doctoring," replied a veteran parachutist. "We'll wait a little and then send for another doctor, maybe there's one free."

Vasya stayed behind to look after the doctor. The latter had already recovered consciousness. Before that he had merely stirred his lips painfully, raving about his wife who had lived in Leningrad, and who had not wanted to leave, and about the son he was expecting.

Soon two gravely wounded men were brought in. One of them had been badly hit in both legs, the other in the left arm. They were groaning loudly and calling for the doctor. One of the orderlies ran for the surgeon, but was a long time in coming back. Evidently he was very busy. The groans of the wounded men could be heard even through the thick walls. Doctor Issayev opened his eyes and listened, and on his parched lips a wistful smile appeared. He asked for a drink. Taking a few greedy gulps, he tried to stand up. The orderly supported him.

Then he walked in to the wounded men and asked for his instruments. The room became hushed. The men were ashamed of their moaning. They realized what this wounded man with the fiery eyes wanted to do. He was going to operate on them. The orderlies gazed at Issayev in silent admiration.

The doctor made ready for the first operation. Exerting his will power to the utmost, he forced himself to forget his own agonizing pain. He felt nothing, saw nothing but the bared part of the body of the wounded man lying before him. The operation was successful. Moved to the depths of their souls, the men watched every movement of Issayev's deft, steady hands. The next operation, and then another. . . .

The sound of the fighting penetrated into the house where the first-aid station had been set up. The field of action was spreading. The paratroopers were in constant danger of a blow in the rear from the neighbouring villages, which were still in the hands of the Germans. It was imperative for them to capture the two neighbouring populated places. This would immediately cut an important German line of communication, and deprive the enemy of an outlet to the highway. Moreover, the capture of these two villages would force the Germans out of the fringe of the big woods from which place they could fire on the reinforcements coming up to the paratroopers. It was decided to take these villages by a surprise attack, at one swift blow. The Germans, who were engaged in the fighting in Luchi and unable to determine the size of the landing party, could not expect an offensive on their comparatively remote flanks.

A party of paratroopers made a lightning raid on the astounded Nazis in the village far to the west of Luchi, utterly routing them. It was necessary to inform their comrades immediately of their success and the elimination of the threat from that quarter. This would enable the paratroopers to realign their forces and increase their pressure on Luchi.

Radio operator Ivan Parasyuta and his assistant immediately rigged up their transmitter in one of the houses and began to send out the message.

Before Parasyuta finished sending his message a heavy shell burst near the house. The glass showered down from the windows, the windowframes flew out, the walls shook, the family portraits fell from the nails on the walls and plaster showered down from the ceiling. This was followed by a still heavier blast. A pail of water that was standing on a bench crashed to the floor. The wall clock fell, the oven cracked and the grate flew out with a bang. But the radio operator calmly continued to transmit his information.

Another powerful explosion roared. The partition dividing the big room in two collapsed. The radio apparatus bounded to the other end of the room. The antenna was severed and the assistant radio operator was wounded. The report was not finished. It was necessary to render first aid to the wounded man. Besides Parasyuta himself had been severely bruised.

But coolness and self-possession are probably among the most important traits in parachutists. Parasyuta bandaged the wounded man, picked up the torn antenna and snatching the radio under his arm ran to the other end of the village. There, with his usual skill, he again set up his transmitter and set to work sending out the interrupted radiogram.

The enemy shifted their fire, and once again shells began to explode near the radio station. A barn near the house caught fire. Tongues of flame began to lick the walls of Parasyuta's new station, but he continued his transmission.

When Colonel Kazankin showed up in the village, Parasyuta ran up to him in a singed jacket and smoking hat and saluting smartly reported:

"Comrade Colonel, the radio station is working. The radiogram was transmitted with a delay of three minutes."

The Colonel was familiar with Parasyuta's work. He knew that when it was necessary to send urgently some extremely important information to



the commander of the front, Parasyuta could make his small station heard a long distance away. He would rig up his antenna, change its direction and in accordance with the time of the day change the wave-length. He would spend the night, the next day and the next night again, thirty-six hours, without sleep, but he would establish connections.

Silently Kazankin held out his hand to the radio operator.

. . . The second village was also taken by the Soviet airborne troops. The realignment was carried out in good time. All the forces of the paratroopers surged towards Luchi. Lieutenant Petrov and his men were already approaching the outskirts of the village from the East after having joined a paratroop party that had been coming through the woods.

At that time Surgeon Issayev was finishing his sixth operation. A few minutes passed and the door of the house flew open with a bang. Two orderlies carried in Lieutenant Petrov. He had just been wounded in the stomach. At the sight of his friend lying on the stretcher, Issayev swayed. He knew that Petrov's life was in his hands, but his strength was already giving way.

His eyes were bloodshot with the strain and a large lock of his blue-black hair fell over his cold, perspiring forehead. Gritting his teeth and making a superhuman effort, Issayev summoned all his professional skill to his assistance and began to operate on his friend, uttering only the one sentence:

"My hand will not falter, I promised you that, old man."

He had just finished making the last stitches when the surgeon for whom the orderly had gone came in. Issayev stared at him through the haze that was already veiling his eyes. Violent convulsions shook his over-strained body. The instruments clattered to the floor from his hands, he staggered and fell.

Sacrificing himself, he had saved seven lives that day. . . .

Fighting was already raging beyond Luchi. Having lost this important point, the German Command was obliged to withdraw large forces from the "big front." The passing of Luchi and the immediate neighbourhood into the hands of the Red Army threatened to deprive the German Command of all possibility of using the railway for supplies, transport and evacuation.

## HOW THE TOWN OF X WAS CAPTURED

A little before the events we have just described, a small party of paratroopers landed quite some distance to the northwest of Luchi.

It was a calm night. A full moon shed its cold blue light on the snowbound expanses. Suddenly a scarcely visible red dot flashed in one spot amidst the snowdrifts, immediately answered by a green one, both of them disappearing just as rapidly as they had appeared.

This was the signal that had been agreed on for the assembly of the paratroopers.

In charge of the party was commander Pikulev. He took stock of the situation and realized that they were in an extremely difficult situation.

The concentration point of commander Anufriev's detachment was a long distance away, and there were only nine men in the party. The surrounding villages and towns were alive with Germans.

What was to be done? Should he proceed to join the main body of the detachment? Or should he wait for reinforcements and lie low for the time being, hiding from the Germans?

No, paratroopers could not act in such a way. Resolute action is a law with them. As soon as they land they must set to work, without waiting for the rest to assemble. If the situation so demands, they must fight no matter what the circumstances are: if the senior commander is not there, then you must take command yourself.

The first task was to reconnoitre.

Pikulev sent out patrols in various directions. Five men remained with him.

. . . They were on the outskirts of a forest of old, thick pines. An enemy plane flew by and a lone rook flapped out of the woods.

Outwardly everything was quiet roundabout just then, but Pikulev knew what he had to do. His small group of daring men had to rouse the local population to active struggle against the enemy. Once the paratroopers came down, they already constituted an entire guerilla detachment.

The scouts soon returned. Pikulev had guessed right. They had come down not far from the big town of X.

To all appearances there were no other paratroopers in the neighbourhood.

In the next village there were no Germans. The paratroopers set off for there and separated up among the houses.

How much joy they brought to the people who were languishing under the yoke of the Nazis. Words were not needed. The peasant saw a tommy gun over the paratrooper's shoulder, the good warm sheepskin jacket, the wadded trousers, saw the cheerful, healthy faces and heard welcome words about the near and dear that had remained on the other side of the front. . . . All that the paratroopers said breathed of confidence and strength.

Here Pikulev learned that another paratroop party was operating not far off.

"Can it be Mazurkevich?" he thought. He knew that his friend was supposed to come down with his party somewhere in the neighbourhood.

The paratroopers spent the whole night in friendly conversation with the collective farmers. Pikulev discussed matters for a long time with the chairman of the collective farm. That night horsemen galloped out of the village in various directions. And in the morning the paratroopers went off into the forest.

The forest came to life. Now here, now there a bush would stir, a bearded face topped by a warm hat would peer forth and rook round. . . . Old men, beardless youngsters and girls made their way to the paratroopers over secluded, snowbound paths. They asked endless questions about Moscow, about Stalin, and arranged about further work. The truth about their native land and news of the landing of Soviet paratroopers spread throughout the whole region.

The first part of their mission had been accomplished. Now Pikulev's party advanced to the South, leaving behind it newly organized guerilla detachments. Along the way, the paratroopers severed telephone lines, blew up bridges and set ambushes on the road. To every Soviet person they met they told what was doing on the various fronts.

"If only I could find Mazurkevich," Pikulev kept thinking. He was worried about his friend. And what was most important they could accomplish a great deal more if only they could join forces. He led his party in a forced march, without rest, to the place where according to what the collective farmers had said the other party of paratroopers should be.

At last they began to find traces of their comrades' work along the forest roads: a German waggon with a dead horse and driver, a severed telephone line. . . . By these traces and what the collective farmers had told him Pikulev found Mazurkevich. There were thirty men with him.

The men were overjoyed at seeing each other. The two friends embraced.

"Well, old man, what were you poking around for? Didn't I tell you to make a noise? We'd have come to you in a tick."

And Mazurkevich himself was the first to burst out laughing—not at his own simple joke, but because it was so wonderful to meet again under the dazzling sun amidst the snowy hills.

"We met up anyway," Pikulev replied. "Now the devil himself won't be able to get the better of us."

The combined detachment now had two mortars, thirty-five automatic rifles, sub-machine guns and grenades. The paratroopers were now a large and formidable force. They could set to work carrying out their main mission, given them by the commander and commissar—to capture the town of X with the help of guerilla fighters. . . .

The paratroopers were advancing through the woods. Suddenly a bearded man in a black fur hat, with a cartridge belt slung over his shoulder, rose in their path and shouted:

"Halt! Who goes?"

It was a narrow path along which it was possible to pass only in single file. Near a big stump to one side of the path greyish smoke was curling. Some distance away was a field kitchen drawn by a horse that was tethered to a fir tree. To the great delight of Pikulev and Mazurkevich they learned that they had stumbled across the famous guerilla detachment under "Granddad."

They found out all they had to know about X from the guerillas. It seemed the Germans were highly alarmed at the situation that had arisen. They were constantly making sorties and raids on the villages in which guerilla fighters made their appearance. In the town they felt as if they were on an uninhabited island, and thought with terror of what was going on in the populated places round about.

The town of X is a big crossroad, so to speak, in which many highways meet. From the North it is connected with an important railway and a highway. In the town itself were munition dumps, armament repair shops and large supplies of food and fodder which the Nazis had looted.

Pikulev and Mazurkevich realized that it would be impossible to capture the town with only the forces of the paratroopers and "Granddad's" guerillas. But their previous work had not been in vain. Small guerilla detachments were already operating everywhere in the neighbourhood. The paratroopers maintained constant connection with them and were preparing them for the forthcoming operation.

Together with the guerilla fighters, the paratroopers occupied village after village around the town. In these villages the guerillas set up their defences in accordance with all the rules. With "Granddad" Pikulev worked out a plan for blockading the town and completely surrounding it. The paratroopers broke up into four squads, each having from eight to ten tommy-guns. These joined the combined guerilla detachments, stiffening the discipline in the latter, giving them a minimum of military training and in general raising their morale.

Then began brisk and spirited work. Day and night the paratroopers and the guerillas chopped down trees in the forest, dragging them closer to the roads, erected snow walls and dugouts, and mined roads.

No acts of sabotage were carried out during this period. The Germans knew that the neighbouring villages were in the hands of the guerillas, but all was quiet in the town. The Nazis decided that they were in no danger. During those days no one troubled them. The woods seemed to be asleep. There is the same deceptive silence in the early spring fields, when the snow still lies in a heavy even layer over it, while under this blanket spring rivulets and streams are already stirring, already looking for a way out, eating away the blanket, at first slowly and then faster and faster, eventually merging with and destroying the snow blanket, washing it away and carrying the water from the fields to the flooded rivers.

Preparations for blockading the city continued for six days. Everyone was up to his ears in work. "Specialists" worked on special assignments. Kolik, an armourer, took charge of supplying the men with arms. During this time he succeeded in collecting and repairing twenty-five rifles, a heavy and a light machine gun, and several mortars, and collected in the villages many grenades and approximately three thousand cartridges.

At the agreed hour the men took their places on the barricades they had set up. Armed with tommy guns, the paratroopers hid themselves in ambush. It was their task not to let a single Nazi get away alive during the assault on the town if he would not surrender. A narrow ditch, dug under cover of darkness, stretched to the town itself, where the ammunition dumps were. The bottom of this ditch was sprinkled with gunpowder.

Everyone was keyed up as they waited for the signal. Pikulev and Mazurkevich were a little worried. The sabotage party was supposed to give the signal, but it was late.

The guerilla fighters and paratroopers moved up to the very gates of the town and from there stared until their eyes ached in the direction of the sector where the sabotage party was scheduled to be operating. The men were already seeing green spots and circles in front of their eyes with the strain, when suddenly a flaming snake writhed over the sparkling moonlit snow. This is what the men had been waiting for, but now they could no longer

believe their own eyes. The roar of the first explosion boomed and then the sound of explosions became more frequent: the shells in the German dump were blowing up. At the same time the big wooden bridge at the edge of the town burst into flames.

This alone was enough to sow the wildest panic among the Nazis. They rushed to get their property out of the town. To the infernal music of explosions, in the dancing light of fires, the big transport hastily moved northward over the highway out of the town.

The paratroopers let them come up to the ambush and opened fire. Simultaneously another transport began to move along another highway, to the South. This transport was met by the guerilla fighters from the "Hurricane" detachment. And indeed not even a hurricane could have wrought such destruction as they did in the ranks of the Nazis. . . .

Those Germans who still remained alive rushed about the town. Their panic was indescribable. Soldiers rushed from house to house, from street to street, from road to road, but everywhere they met the same thing—lead.

The garrison had tried to call out help at the very beginning, but in vain. All communication had been cut off by the paratroopers and the guerillas. In the town itself brief skirmishes flared up: the local population were settling scores with the Germans.

In the morning the paratroopers together with the guerilla fighters entered the town, and once again over the premises of the district Soviet, the Soviet flag waved aloft in the blue sky. Three days later, after having organized the defence of the town, the paratroopers set out to join their detachment, which at that time was operating to the East.



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K. SIMONOV

## THREE DAYS

HE battle flared up with renewed vigour. Every five minutes or so the walls of the cottage shook with the rumble of distant explosions. The Germans were bombing the crossroads to right and left of the village.

But the tankmen would not be going into action until the next day: for the time being they were resting after a raid.

My companion was a man of medium height. His youthful but tired face, in spite of its strength of character, bore traces of the harrowing experiences he had undergone, the sleepless nights and the constant hobnobbing with death—all that for twenty months had been the lot of the men who had been in it from the very outset. As he spoke, he involuntarily began to gesticulate, as Southerners are wont to do, and at such times a slight grimace of pain would flit across his face. He had been wounded in both arms, the wrist of his right hand and the elbow of his left. He could still manage somehow to move the fingers of his right hand slightly, but his left arm hung limply in splints. Nevertheless, he was bent on going into action again the next day or the day after, as though his arms would be sure to get better by then.

Lieutenant Chistyakov was a fellow townsman of mine and we were the same age. He had been born the same year I was and had lived in the same town on the Volga for a long time. And although I had not been with him on his last raid, bottled up in a tank for three whole days, although I had not gone through what he had, nevertheless I could somehow picture quite vividly all that he had experienced and seen in the course of those three days.

And it was of these three last days that Chistyakov spoke most of all—the three days after which he had still not been able to get enough sleep in compensation, after which there were still dark circles under his eyes, while his face was still haggard and his wounds not yet healed.



**TANK IN ACTION**

*Pencil Drawing by Nikolai Zhukov*



FORCE LANDING

*Gouache by Pavel Kirpichev (Grekov Studios)*



... It was early morning when the advance guard set out on the raid far into the enemy rear. Chistyakov's tanks had halted in the vicinity of a small town which had been occupied during the night. The Lieutenant had ten T-34 tanks under his command, ten sturdy, squat machines, favourites with both the tankmen and the infantry. Four of the tank crews had already smelt powder, the rest were going into action for the first time, but were ready to fight in traditional tankmen style—sparing neither the enemy nor themselves.

Chistyakov had received the course he was to follow from Major Ovcharov, the tanned veteran in command of the unit who did not in the least resemble the Master of Philology of pre-war days. The Major's final orders, as always during an offensive, had been short and to the point.

"Stick to 'em," the Major had stressed. "Understand? Stick to 'em—the main thing's not to give them a chance to catch their breath."

Chistyakov gave the "Follow my lead" signal to his crews and they set off along the slushy southern road, sending ice splinters and splashes of water flying in every direction. After covering some nine or ten kilometres, they encountered the first Germans. There were about four hundred of them. They were moving along the road in column formation and when the Soviet tanks appeared unexpectedly from behind a hillock, the field began to resound with their disorderly rifle fire and short machine-gun bursts. They scattered over the field to right and left of the road, running, falling and crouching on the ground. Some kept up a running fire, others simply sprawled on the ground, burying their heads in their hands and waiting for death to mow them down or pass them by.

Chistyakov did not open fire at once. His tanks pressed on for half a kilometre or so without firing a shot, and only when they had penetrated into the very thick of the fleeing Germans did Chistyakov bring his machine gun into play.

Soon the tanks began to forge ahead again. To right and to left of the road lay flat fields. Shortly after, however, the ground dipped to form a hollow and it was here, while making their way down the slope, that the tankmen came under heavy artillery fire. A self-propelled German cannon was firing from a distance of six hundred metres.

The grey morning mist still filled the hollow, and all that Chistyakov could see was the spurts of flame flashing one after the other as the German gun fired. He sent two or three shrapnel shells in that direction and then drove full tilt towards the gun. He was determined to reach it at all costs and crush it under the tracks of his tank or to mow the crew down at short range, at thirty to twenty metres, and then in any case to push on to the cannon, drive over it, feel the German steel crunching under the full weight of his machine.

He fired several more shells in the direction of the gun as he advanced. On reaching the brick wall on the outskirts of the village near which it was standing, he found that the crew had already been wiped out by one of his shells. But he could no longer hold himself back, and ran the gun down before turning into the village street.

He was the first to break into the village, half a minute before the rest of his group. A number of German carts were moving down the street. He crushed the carts under his machine and then turned, first left and then right, pursuing with his fire the German infantrymen who were scattering in every direction.

Beyond the village the road ascended steeply again. Chistyakov had an excellent view of the German trucks slowly and labouriously crawling up the steep hill, skidding on the muddy road. Cutting across a small bridge, Chistyakov outflanked the enemy vehicles from the left, lumbered up the hillside ahead of the Germans and, reaching the crest of the hill, felt that he had the whip hand of them. The enemy was caught in a trap.

The other tanks were busy in the village. The automatic-riflemen following on the tanks had dismounted on the outskirts of the village and were combing the streets and yards for Germans. Chistyakov opened the hatch and popped his head out to take a breath of fresh air. The din of firing and shouts burst on his ears. But it was like balm to him—this frantic uproar of the Germans, the selfsame Germans who not so long ago had so insolently and confidently advanced along these very same roads in their sinister machines.

Half an hour later, Chistyakov's ten tanks were well on their way to the next village. A line of German infantry defences stretched along the ridge of hills overlooking the village. At a signal from him, all ten tanks crested the range and, coming out onto the plateau, began to steam-roller the enemy infantrymen. The Germans began to raise their hands. Chistyakov opened the hatch of his tank and stood up to give the signal to cease fire. That very second—or rather tenth of a second—he caught sight of a German officer standing nearby with a levelled revolver in his hand. Instinctively, Chistyakov ducked, and the bullet whizzed past his ear. Slamming the hatch to, he riddled the officer with a burst from his machine gun. Then he raised the hatch once again. The German soldiers surrendered. When the automatic-riflemen reached the spot, Chistyakov detailed ten men to escort the prisoners, while the rest took their places on the tanks.

The raid was continued. Chistyakov was again first to enter the next village. He tore through the whole length of the village, running down a staff car on the way. But in the market place he was met by heavy artillery fire, first from one side, and then from all four. Several shells glanced off the turret without piercing the armour. Chistyakov swung round and, firing as he went, made his way along the fringe of the village back to where his own men were. Shortly after, six of his tanks skirted the village, while he, together with the remaining machines, launched a frontal attack. They crushed four German guns, one after the other. But there was such a racket in the turret, Chistyakov felt that his head was splitting, just as if someone were pounding on it with a sledgehammer. In the last few minutes three more shells had hit the turret, but without piercing the armour. Barring a few dents, the tank was intact, but Chistyakov felt as if a heavy, leaden weight were pressing down on his skull, his eyes and ears, and that his splitting headache would never go away.

Abandoning the village, the German automatic-riflemen took to their heels, hiding in haystacks in the fields. The tanks approached each haystack in turn, setting fire to it with incendiary shells. Scrambling out of the burning hay the Germans tried to get away, only to be mown down by the tank machine guns.

Carried away by the chase, Chistyakov sent his tank hurtling up a hill, breasted it and was making full tilt for a fenced-off cemetery when an anti-tank gun fired several times at him in quick succession. One of the shots scored a direct hit, severely denting the turret. Another shell tore off a piece of the armour-plating. Chistyakov trained his gun and silenced the German cannon, placing a shell right under its wheels. Then he swung his tank round and returned to the village. The tank-borne tommy-gunners were scouring the village streets, rounding up the surviving Germans, while the tankmen, on Chistyakov's orders, refuelled from a gasoline truck that had just come up.

A field kitchen had arrived together with the truck. Perspiring and deafened, the tankmen climbed out of their machines, and crowding round the kitchen, gulped down some hot soup. For the first time since they had set out, the men were able to have a quiet smoke and exchange a few brief remarks about the results of the raid.

Chistyakov glanced at his watch and noted with surprise that exactly twenty-four hours had elapsed since they had started out. Having finished smoking their cigarettes, the men climbed into their places and proceeded on their given course.

Between two hills, just in front of a big village, a river wound its way. They headed straight for the river, running onto its frozen surface. The ice cracked under their tracks. Several guns opened fire at them from the outskirts of the village. It was during the delay while crossing the river that they suffered their first loss. Tsysoyev's tank, which was advancing on the left flank, was set on fire by a German shell. Now there remained nine tanks. Coming out on the opposite bank they rushed the hill, but here they encountered the heavy fire of a whole anti-tank battery housed in a barn which stood out on the crest of the hill. The tanks concentrated their fire on the barn and succeeded in setting it ablaze. Shells began to explode inside the barn and the battery was silenced. Here the tankmen captured another fifty German infantrymen.

It was broad daylight when the tanks entered the village. The streets were thronged with people and Chistyakov rode with his hatch open, waving to the villagers who lined both sides of the road. The other tanks followed behind. They also had their hatches open and their crews, too, were waving to the villagers and shouting words of greeting that were drowned out by the clattering of the caterpillars. Chistyakov, his overalls and face grimy and stained with oil, clambered out of his tank in the middle of the street. The girls crowded round his machine. They threw their arms around his neck and kissed his unshaven cheeks.

Half an hour later the tanks were again on their way. Chistyakov pulled up in front of a small cottage near the crossing of two roads, covered with a trackless carpet of unsullied snow.

"I say, missus!" he called out, trying to make his voice heard above the roar of his engine.

For a long time no one appeared. At last a tall, grey-haired old woman looked out through the half-opened door, and shading her eyes with her hand peered intently at the tanks, as if unable to believe that these were really Red Armymen. Then suddenly throwing out her arms, she ran up to the leading tank. Pressing against the armour-plating, she reached up her arms and clasped Chistyakov's hands in her own, exclaiming:

"Oh, my dear! Sonny! Sonny! . . ."

She kept repeating this word over and over again, seemingly unable to utter another word. Then calming down somewhat, she explained in great detail and at length how best to reach the next village by a roundabout route.

It was getting on for evening. By nightfall the tanks, making a wide detour, came to the road leading to the village. At the crossroads Chistyakov stopped in order to allow the tanks to close in a bit. A whirling, wet snow had begun to fall. When the men climbed out onto the turrets to take a breath of fresh air, the snowflakes settled thickly on their helmets and flushed faces. Only here, during this respite, did Chistyakov realize how mortally tired they all were. He decided to call a short halt and give his men an opportunity to take a rest. For an hour and a half, under the incessantly falling snow, the men slept by turns, some inside the tanks, others outside on the turrets. While some of them slept others stood guard, watching the roads.

An hour and a half later, after covering two or three kilometres, they tore into the village in the dead of night. Now they were indeed deep in the enemy lines. The Germans garrisoning the village were sleeping peacefully in the cottages with no presentiment of danger. The village streets were blocked with trucks standing outside the cottages. Chistyakov counted as many as a hundred and fifty. The streets were so jammed it was impossible for the tanks to get through. In order to clear a road for themselves, they had to smash through a score or so trucks, much as they hated to do so.

In this village the tankmen freed a batch of Soviet prisoners of war who had been locked up in a barn. Three hundred tortured, emaciated men, who had lost almost all semblance to human beings, and whom the Germans had been driving ever deeper into their rear in the course of the last two weeks, shooting down those who fell behind, were now reunited with their own people. Their appearance, as they poured through the open door of the barn into the street, was so terrible that Chistyakov was hard put to it to prevent his men from wreaking vengeance on the German prisoners they had taken.

Dawn was breaking when the fighting in the village finally subsided. The villagers gathered round the tanks, and offering their services to the automatic-riflemen, helped them to make the round of the huts and barns and ferret out the hidden Germans. One old man reported to Chistyakov that the German Commandant, who had been quartered in his house, had fled in his underwear, leaving his uniform and even his greatcoat and boots behind, not to mention his arms and papers. Nobody could tell whether the Commandant had escaped or whether he had been killed, for a good half of the corpses which lay scattered in the streets were just as scantily clad.

It was freezing, although the day was bright and sunny. The tankmen had a snack, their second meal since they had set out on the raid. The field kitchen was somewhere on the way, so they availed themselves of trophies captured from the Germans, warming themselves up with German cognac, eating a bar or so of chocolate, more out of curiosity than pleasure, and taking a few puffs at malodorous German cigars. After that, together with the automatic-riflemen, they continued on their way.

They broke into the next village when the sun was already high overhead. It also was crowded with retreating German infantrymen. Here, however, the Germans did not scatter as they had done in the other villages but took cover in the cottages. The tanks posted themselves at all the roads leading to and from the village, shutting off all possible avenues of escape, while the Tommy-guns cleared the cottages of the Germans, who were putting up a desperate resistance. Chistyakov opened the hatch of his tank and stood up in order the better to take in the situation. It was here that he was wounded in his right hand.

The only remaining obstacle on the way to the town which was the ultimate objective of the raid was a range of fortified elevations on which the Germans had apparently decided to make a stand. Spreading out in fan formation, the tanks moved towards the heights. On Chistyakov's orders three of them attacked a small village nestling at the foot of a hill and captured two long-range guns before the crews had time to get them away.

The attack on the hills was launched late in the evening. The heights were girdled by a ring of fire. The Germans were firing from all arms—rifles, machine guns, automatic rifles and cannon. The broken, variegated chains of machine-gun bursts punctuated the darkness with their dots and dashes. Anti-tank shells, or "pigs" as they were contemptuously termed by the tankmen, flew overhead like fiery comets. The hills were covered with a thick coating of ice and the tanks reached only half-way up the slope then slid down again to the bottom. Nothing daunted, they tried again and this time gained the top by zig-zagging up the slippery incline.

Here Rodionov's crew, who had managed to forge ahead, perished during the first few minutes of the battle. A German cannon had sent shell after shell point-blank at the oncoming tank. The tank had rushed headlong at the gun, but ran into a minefield some ten metres from it. It had been moving at such a speed, however, that even though it was damaged and its entire crew killed, it continued to hurtle forward, crushing the gun under its weight before coming to a standstill. Salmanov's tank, which had also succeeded in topping the hill, met with the same fate. Then Bobkov's tank went up in flames. Just before that Chistyakov crushed a German gun. The fierce firing from every side literally deafened him. Five shells hit his tank at close range. One of them got stuck in the double-plated armour of the turret, but still the tank continued on its way. Six tanks succeeded in cresting the hill, and, after crushing or silencing the dozen or so gun nests there, pressed forward on their way to the town.

The night was pitch dark, but dawn was near. At the approaches to the town, which had not been reconnoitred, Chistyakov sent out a scouting party, and in the meantime called a halt to wait for the first glimmer of light.

One of the tanks, commanded by young Lieutenant Erokhin, for whom this raid was his first time under fire, did not manage to receive the orders in time and dashed on into the town, where he drove up and down the streets all night long. In spite of his terrible fatigue, Chistyakov could not get a wink of sleep. He could hear the tank rumbling through the streets of the town, firing. At times the engine would suddenly die down, and Chistyakov's heart would sink. He would be sure that all was over with Erokhin. But the engine would come to life again, and again the bark of its gun would be heard. By dawn the minefields were reconnoitred and Chistyakov's tanks filtered into the town together with the morning mist. Erokhin's tank, its cannon shattered, stood in one of the streets on the outskirts of the town. The Lieutenant was holding the Germans at bay with his machine gun.

An hour later everything was over. Chistyakov's unit, together with several other tank units which had converged on the town by different routes, combed the streets, leaving it to the automatic-riflemen to settle scores with the Germans who were still resisting here and there. Chistyakov climbed out of the tank and leaned against the wall of a house. For a second it seemed to him that he would drop, so exhausted was he. His left arm hung limply at his side. He had been severely wounded by a shell splinter just below the elbow and blood was trickling down his tattered tunic and over his numbed fingers, which no longer felt anything at all. He glanced at his watch automatically. It was 7 a.m.—the exact hour on which they had left for their raid three days ago. Three days. . . .

In spite of his exhaustion and dizziness, Chistyakov suddenly felt flushed with joy, joy such as only the knowledge of a hard-fought battle crowned with victory can give, when beside you stands your shell-battered, smoke-begrimed tank, its engine running unevenly as though breathing heavily, exhausted, its machine gun shattered, its turret damaged, with splinters and iron shards from mangled trucks clinging to the tracks, and its armour-plating spattered with enemy blood. But it had won through, damn it all, and victory was victory, at whatever price of exhaustion and suffering it may have been achieved.



MIKHAIL BRAGIN

## SOVIET TANKMEN IN THE BATTLE OF KIEV



SOVIET tankmen played an important part in the great Battle of Kiev. Relentlessly the tankmen pursued the enemy forces routed during the summer events and rolling back to the Dnieper. The Germans thought they would check our forces at the Dnieper, and winter in Kiev. But once again they miscalculated, once again underrated our strength.

The Red Army Command realized that it was absolutely necessary to force the river immediately, on the march and to forestall the enemy by capturing a bridgehead on the right bank. The crossing of the Dnieper by the Red Army will go down in history as an unsurpassed example of daring military strategy.

The first to appear on the left bank of the Dnieper, near Kiev, was a tank brigade. The great river in its grey framework of riverside shallows surged before the tankmen, while in front of them and ahead rose the high right bank. White cottages gleamed in the distance and a church was etched against the background of blue sky. The mobile rifle battalion of the tank unit fell in.

"The Dnieper is before us," said the Commander. "I am asking for volunteers to cross it, attracting the attention and fire of the Germans so that the battalion may make the crossing safely."

Nearly all of them were members of the Young Communist League. As one man, the whole unit stepped forward. The finest of these splendid lads were chosen—Petukhov, Ivanov, Sysolyatin, Semyonov. A young Ukrainian guerilla fighter joined the four friends.

What could five young fighting men do? How could they cross the Dnieper in broad daylight under the very eye of the enemy? The guerilla fighter led his new friends along an almost imperceptible path to the river, where a boat was hidden. They pushed off from the left bank. A Messerschmitt swept over them like a buzzard, but the German pilot never dreamed that

the Russians were already at the Dnieper, and veering round he turned back to the West.

All was quiet. Screened from view by an island in the middle of the river, the Y.C.L.'ers cautiously rowed up to it, landed, made their way through the sharp-leaved osiers to the other side of the island, and got into another boat that had been hidden there by the young guerilla fighter. Now they were in full view of the enemy. The water round the rowboat boiled and bubbled with bullets. Soon mortar bombs began to send up water spouts. Fragments splintered the stern of the frail craft, which rocked on the waves raised by shells. But the daring men plied their oars with a will and soon reached shallow water. Private Petukhov—who was in command of the party—gave the order:

“Follow me!”

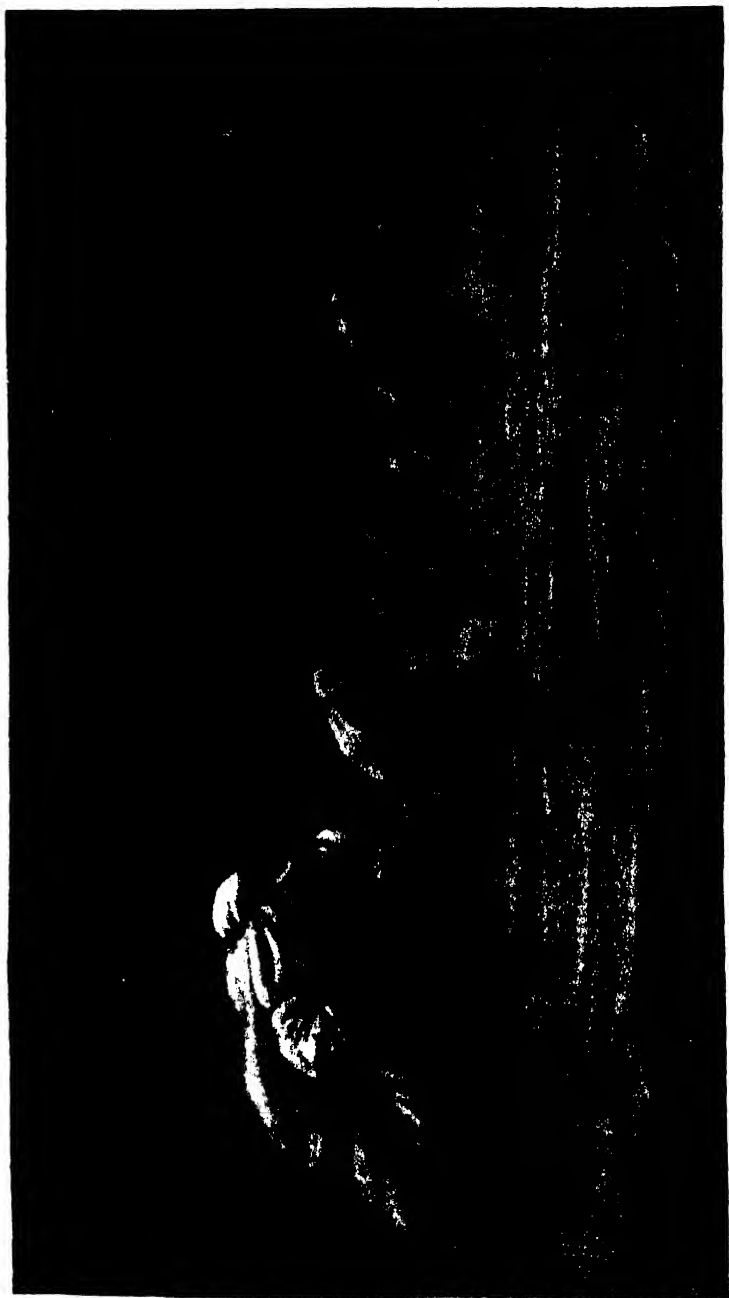
Jumping out of the boat, they waded to the shore, lay low for a while in the bushes, after which, running from mound to mound and keeping up a steady fire, they pushed on to the village. And the seemingly impossible happened. The League members forced the Germans to take up the defensive and entered into an exchange of fire with them. Meanwhile the entire mobile battalion was hastening to the aid of these heroic young men. They crossed on logs, paddling with sapper's shovels, on barn doors, on ground sheets sewn together and stuffed with straw. The artillerymen found a leaky old barge somewhere and pushed across, bailing out the water with their billy cans.

Thus the battalion reached the right bank and advanced on Grigorovka from all directions. Exhausted as they were by their march to the Dnieper and the river crossing, the men encountered a new obstacle. The ground here seemed to be contorted in a weird grimace that furrowed the shore with gullies and clefts and overhanging sand walls that crumbled at a touch. But several of the men clambered onto one another's shoulders, seized the roots protruding from the sand and pulled themselves up. Then they tied their greatcoats together by the sleeves, fastened their belts together and with this improvised rope pulled up the men below. Thus, despite their mortal fatigue, they reached the top by sheer grit and persistence, and stormed Grigorovka.

The German garrison was routed. Grigorovka passed into our hands. But fascist aircraft were already droning overhead, and in the distance enemy tanks and trucks could be seen approaching the crossing. Launching an offensive on the West, the riflemen intercepted them. Fighting raged for the bridgehead. The Red Army men fought stalwartly. Realizing the danger that threatened him, the enemy massed troops against the battalion and hurled ever new units into furious counter-attacks.

Evening fell. The battalion had not yielded an inch. In spite of the grininess of the situation, the valiant young lads of the mobile battalion retained their spirit of mischief. When they found out that the two hundred-metre strip of “no-man's land” separating them from the enemy was a melon patch and full of ripe fruit, they raked it with their tommy guns, determined not to leave a single melon to the Germans.





FOR HOME AND COUNTRY, FOR STALIN!

*Gouache by Nikolai Zhukov*



TANKMAN

*Pencil Drawing by Alexei Laptov*

Under cover of this fire four Y.C.L.'ers made their way to a gully. Two of them climbed up into the German lines, dragged an officer out of the dugout and, swinging him over the edge of the gully by the hands and feet, dropped him to the bottom, where their comrades waited. The German turned out to be an important engineer from the Todt Organization who had come there to supervise the building of the fortifications on the right bank of the Dnieper.

At dawn the enemy barrage was intensified and an infantry division advanced to the attack. When the day's fighting was over the Battalion Commander reported to HQ that the battalion held the eastern end of Grigorovka. He was asked why he had not reported the withdrawal of his forces from the centre and the western end of the village. The Commander explained that his men had not abandoned their positions. They had remained there to the death, while those who were still among the living were fighting tenaciously, though less than one hundred metres separated them from the river.

That night a mobile rifle brigade emerged on the left bank of the Dnieper. The mobile infantry of a tank formation is infantry of a special calibre. The traditions of victory are ingrained in the men, for they have taken part in some of the biggest engagements of the Patriotic War and emerged the victor. This gave them confidence in themselves. They had accomplished marches that were without equal, for it was a rule with them not to lag behind their tanks whatever the conditions were, even if their trucks were unable to get through the terrain or were smashed by enemy fire. The men were both well trained and capable of delivering a heavy volume of fire.

The brigade had ascertained that our mobile battalion was sustaining heavy casualties in the unequal fighting on the right bank and that the Germans were rushing up reinforcements from the West. Leaving their transports and field kitchens behind them, they pressed forward to the Dnieper. Crossing the river in one vigorous push, they flung themselves into the battle, and clearing the enemy out of Grigorovka, continued their offensive westward.

The first tanks crossed the Dnieper on ferries, covered by the brigade, and then infantry units began to arrive. But the enemy did not let up.

The German forces around Kiev increased to five or six times their original strength in the course of those days. Panzer divisions and SS units came up. Supported by artillery and aircraft, the Germans launched counter-attack after counter-attack. At one time they tried to cut off the whole bridgehead, at others to hack it to pieces. Fighting continued day and night.

The mobile infantry repulsed forty-three counter-attacks here. The enemy had decided to push our units into the Dnieper and prisoners confidently announced the date by which this would be accomplished. The bridgehead was besieged. Through the early morning mist new truckborne German units kept arriving every day. When they were wiped out, others came to take their place. A newly arrived German infantry division launched fourteen attacks on the brigade. The next day it attacked eleven

times, but it attacked no more, for it had ceased to exist. The survivors of this division were formed into a battalion and attached to another division.

Still the mobile brigade held out, beating off counter-attacks. Together with the tank units and large infantry formations it strove to enlarge the bridgehead and wipe out the enemy man power. These engagements in gullies and on slopes, in narrow defiles and villages were actually big, hard-fought battles. They devoured a tremendous quantity of ammunition and entailed the evacuation of the wounded and the bringing up of reserves. It became clear that unless a regular crossing were established over the river it would be impossible to supply the men at the bridgehead. The tankmen felt this most of all, and they were the first to begin construction of a bridge across the Dnieper.

Under fire of artillery and aircraft, the General inspected the left bank in search of a suitable place. Near a railway station he came across a number of warehouses on which construction had been begun before the war. He made inquiries concerning the men who had been building them, and was told that the foreman had been a certain well-known carpenter, Musii Bozhko. The General found this old Ukrainian and asked him where the other carpenters of his artel lived. Then he sent to the bridgehead for Lieutenant Colonel Rylsky and Engineer Topolsky. Topolsky was put in charge of the construction as chief engineer and given several officers from the sappers and political officers from the tanks as assistants. Lieutenant Colonel Rylsky's task was to organize the building work.

Topolsky set to work on the plans for the bridge while Rylsky proceeded to mobilize workers for the construction job. At dawn the latter set out together with Musii Bozhko and Totsky, chairman of the Village Soviet, to look for carpenters. And although the carpenters themselves were living in dugouts that had been built amidst the ashes of the houses that had been burnt to the ground by the Germans, not wanting to disclose their trade to the enemy, they came to the assistance of the Red Army of their own accord, bringing their fellow villagers with them.

Towering pines and century-old oaks fell to the axe in the riverside woods. Piles and planks were prepared and soon the first pile was driven in on the left bank. From this pile it was necessary to plant a row of stakes across the river to mark the path of the bridge. Thereupon First Lieutenant Mikhailov, the Chief of Staff, plunged into the icy water and diving to the bottom planted the stakes between the two banks.

A group of sappers then lashed together a number of empty gasoline drums and floated out to the middle of the river where they tried to drive in the first pile. But the current was too strong here, and the men made no headway. The river foamed and swirled, overturning both the men and the pile. They tried diving to the bottom and holding the end of the pile while their comrades pounded it from above, but the Dnieper proved stronger. They came up gasping for air and after resting for a moment dived again, but again with the same results. After four hours of this almost superhuman effort they were exhausted and others replaced them. It was eight hours before the lone pile was driven in the middle of the Dnieper. Yet it was necessary to

drive in thousands. But the men learned from their experience and soon five gangs of bridge builders were working away in the river.

A bridge of this length capable of bearing such a load had never yet been built across the Dnieper, still less by tankmen. But they did it. The line of rafts stretched from shore to shore and the bridge began to take shape.

At first the Germans did not notice what was going on here. Later, however, two Junkers flew over and smashed a couple of piles. Within a short time sixteen more were wrecked by artillery fire. Count was taken of the destroyed piles and their loss reported to Headquarters just as reports are made of tanks crippled in battle. And, as in battle, new piles were immediately driven in to take the place of those that had been destroyed. Soon the gleaming white line of the bridge rising over the river delighted the eyes of the tankmen-constructors.

As if they had been waiting for this moment, the Germans sent scores of dive-bombers over. Sapper Mikhailov, twice decorated by the Government, died the death of a hero while directing the rescue of wounded sappers who were being carried away by the waves. The abutments of the bridge were wrecked.

But Rylsky and Topolsky mobilized fresh forces and resumed work. Thereupon German heavy artillery opened up and completely smashed whatever had been left after the air raid. Just as after a defeat in battle, the men waited for the word of their commander.

"The enemy is trying to keep us from building this bridge and to wear down our forces, who are fighting for the bridgehead," said the General. "But we'll build the bridge, and build it faster than we planned originally. What we have to do is work as little as possible on the river itself and get everything ready down to the smallest detail on shore. We'll have to take even greater pains in getting things done for we'll have to do the building at night, in the dark."

... That night it rained. It was pitch black over the Dnieper. The autumn wind swirled through the valley and raised great waves in the river that drenched the men. The heavy logs, wet and slippery, were torn from their hands, but work went on full swing for the sappers and carpenters had given their word to do a full day's work that night and to work in the woods in the daytime. They went without sleep the clock round, snatched an hour or two of rest, and then set to again. The sappers and the carpenters vied with each other in their work, each trying to outdo the other.

And they succeeded in hoodwinking the Germans. The enemy aircraft that flew over the Dnieper did not see a soul on the construction. In two nights the ravages that had been made on the bridge were repaired.

The bridge had now become dearer to the men than their own lives and they fought desperately to complete the construction. Millions of muffled blows over the thousands of piles seemed to echo the artillery barrage over the Dnieper. Meanwhile other bridges were being built across the river elsewhere, for powerful rifle units, but the tankmen were the first to finish their bridge. Tanks and trucks, shells, food and fuel streaked across the bridge to the right bank on the way to Kiev. And while this fierce battle was going on at the bridgehead south of Kiev, fighting just as fierce devel-

oped north of the city. Infantry units that had crossed to the right bank were battling there to enlarge the bridgehead under extremely unfavourable conditions. Just back of the shore, the bank rose before them like a steep wall. It was impossible to take this stronghold from the East. It was decided to attack further to the North. The bank here sloped, but was intersected by arms of the Dnieper and dotted with lakes. But the Russians managed to get to this bridgehead, which was five kilometres in width and twelve in depth.

Meanwhile Lieutenant General Kravchenko's tank formation was pushing ahead rapidly to the assistance of the infantry. They were coming up to take part in the Battle of Kiev. On their way the tankmen encountered a barrier in the Desna, which was very wide and swift-flowing at that spot while the bed was uneven. This river is considerably smaller than the Dnieper but in order to cross it, heavy ferry boats or bridges are needed and the building of such a bridge would take at least a week.

"We have to get to the right bank of the Dnieper," said Lieutenant Colonel Kravchenko. This remark was like an order and at the same time like a pledge. And hundreds of officers, scores of thousands of men found in themselves the strength and means to transform these words into deed. Just as south of Kiev First Lieutenant Mikhailov had plunged into the icy waters of the Dnieper, so here too Lieutenant Pichko of the tanks plunged into the river. He was followed by the driver-mechanic Kuzminin. Swimming around they kept diving down and feeling for the bed with their feet. They discovered that if you crossed the river at an angle instead of straight ahead, avoiding the pits and holes in the bed, it was possible to ford the river. After a while they came out of the water, warmed up a bit and then went in again, taking with them stakes which they floated in front of them and set up along the course which the men would have to follow in fording the river, practically three hundred metres in length and two metres in depth.

Never before in history had tank troops forded a river like this.

The drivers were given their instructions on the bank and every one of them solemnly promised to bring his tank through.

All night long the crews prepared for this unprecedented "march," stuffing up all the slits and crannies in the armour of their machines. It was expected that water would nevertheless filter into the tanks, but the men counted on crossing the river so quickly that the water would not have time to drown the crew or flood the engines. Everything depended on their boldness, their skill, experience and valour.

At dawn the best drivers were the first to head for the shore and drive their tanks into the water across the Desna. They drove blindly, while the tank officers directed them from the turrets. Water seeped into the tanks, drenching the drivers, rising to a level with their seats and even higher. It penetrated to the engines, but the powerful fans expelled the water and at times it seemed that fabulous monsters were swimming across the river, blowing like whales. The first tanks were followed by the others. Thus, tank after tank, battalion after battalion, brigade after brigade, the whole of General Kravchenko's formation crossed the Desna.

After fording the Desna Kravchenko's tanks crossed the Dnieper on ferries and emerged at the bridgehead. The latter had to be extended and held, for it was to serve as a springboard for the offensive on Kiev. It was possible to extend it by launching a joint attack with the infantry, but the tankmen decided to carry out this mission otherwise. They forced a third river around Kiev, the marshy Irpen, came out on its western bank and moving southwest, threatened Kiev from the North.

The enemy realized the peril of their position in face of this moving avalanche of tanks. A strong force of German infantry and tanks struck out to the north of Kiev, along the right bank of the Dnieper, aiming to cut our forces off from the crossing, to destroy the bridgehead and wipe out the infantry holding it. Kravchenko's formation attacked on the East, in the direction of the Dnieper. As a result of this assault the German formation attacking on the North was cut off from Kiev. The attack was launched at night and proved fatal for the enemy, who was taken by surprise. The Germans lost thousands killed and wounded, abandoned forty guns, dozens of mortars and a number of staff cars. In the smashed Divisional Headquarters, from which a German general had fled clad only in his underwear, important papers were captured. As a result of this crushing manoeuvre that had been carried out under such difficult circumstances, the bridgehead was enlarged. Stariye and Noviye Petrovtsi and the woods west of them were captured. In the stubborn battles that ensued, the enemy was routed from Vyshgorod by our tankmen. The commanding heights on the right bank north of Kiev were now in our hands.

Thus it was that the tankmen enlarged the bridgehead and defended it together with the infantry, at the same time inflicting a crushing blow on the Kiev grouping of Germans.



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ALEXANDER MOLODCHY

Guards Captain,  
Twice Decorated with the Order of  
Hero of the Soviet Union

## 180,000 KILOMETRES OVER ENEMY TERRITORY

*Notes of a Bomber Pilot*

**J**

1941

UNE 22. We fell in on the square at the alarm. Our wing Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Balashov, Hero of the Soviet Union, informed us that the German army had attacked along the whole length of our border without any declaration of war. Fascist planes are bombing Kiev, Sevastopol, Kaunas and other cities. We clenched our fists in a fury. That much for the pact of non-aggression! Seems it was just one of Hitler's regular tricks. At the same time as he was holding out a hand of friendship to the people of the Soviet Union, he was preparing to strike a blow like a thief in the night. While showering us with all sorts of talk about peace, he was concentrating his tanks at the borders. He has the advantage of unexpectedness on his side. But this Tyrolian sadist and adventurist has made the mistake of his life! The U.S.S.R. is not France. The Germans will get it in the neck!

The Commander delivered a short speech. He spoke of the seriousness of the war that had begun and called on us to fight courageously and staunchly. Serious danger threatened our country. The fate of the peoples of the Soviet Union was at stake. It was up to us fliers to do our duty. Then he gave us our orders: an operational flight that very night. The time for the take-off will be announced later. We dispersed to get ready for the sortie. We looked over our aircraft and checked the instruments. All of us are thinking of only one thing: to take off as quickly as possible! To meet the enemy head-on!

I am a sub-lieutenant and assistant squadron leader. Seems to me that I know my ship and so forth not too badly. I've a decent training record. I'd love to be the first to take off from the flying field and strike back at the Germans. Sub-Lieutenants Garanin, Sadovsky, Solovyov, Nechayev and Polezhayev, all about a year younger than me and still non-operational, shadow me wherever I go and keep asking how soon we'll be taking off. They're just as impatient as I am. The fellows are terribly keen on pitching into it.



*June 23.* The sortie didn't come off last night. Today everyone is flying except Garanin, Solovyov, Sadovsky, Nechayev, Polezhayev and myself. We're still too young! The "old timers," the one hundred thousand and million flying hour pilots are the first to go up. We've been told to wait.

*June 24.* A bunch of young fliers and myself have been posted to a war factory. We're going to get planes of a new model and form a special group. None of us knows what sort of group this will be. We asked the C.O. when we'd be going out to do some bombing. He opened his eyes wide and said: "Bombing? Have you learned what there is to know about the bus? Who do you think is going to let you go up right away on a new type of aircraft! You have to sweat over them first."

*June 30.* We're going through a conversion course on the new machines. Day after day we're kept at making test flights. And still we're not operational. The machines are first-class. Hell! If only we could take off with a bomb load! What lucky dogs those "old timers" are! They keep hammering away at the Germans all the time. They don't even get a chance to rest. Are we really going to be kept training till the end of the war?

*July 6.* Captain Nikolai Gastello's plane was crippled in a dog fight over enemy territory. But did he bale out? Let himself be taken prisoner? Not he! What he did was to crash-land his blazing aircraft right in the midst of an enemy column. He died a hero.

Valery Chkalov said: "If I had five lives, I wouldn't think twice about giving them for my country, for Stalin." Captain Gastello's heroic deed is in the Chkalov style. That's the "Chkalov way" in the air. Captain Gastello preferred death to the disgrace of being taken prisoner. We'll bear his name in our hearts forever. Our country should be proud of its flier!

I want to live to see victory over the enemy. I would like to live a long time. But if it's my fate to die for my country, I want to meet my death like Captain Gastello did.

*July 9.* The communiques of the Information Bureau are filled with reports of our airmen's feats. The enemy has numerical superiority in the air.

A flight of our planes intercepted a big group of Junkers. A dog fight developed. The Junkers couldn't take it and turned hot-foot for home. Sub-Lieutenants Zdorovtsev and Kharitonov, who had used up all their ammunition, streaked after them, deciding to ram the enemy. Two enemy aircraft with their tails sliced off crashed to the ground. By a skilful manoeuvre Sub-Lieutenant Zhukov forced a Junkers down and then on the dive sent it smack into Lake Pskov.

Zdorovtsev, Zhukov and Kharitonov have been made Heroes of the Soviet Union.

Senior Political Officer Andrei Danilov took on nine Messers. He downed two. Then his ammunition gave out. Thereupon he flew head-on into an enemy machine. He rammed the German and crashed together with him. Ramming is becoming a formidable weapon in tackling the Nazi aircraft. The Germans are already a bit wary of bombing our rear in the daytime. They flew in the daytime in France. They flew in Yugoslavia and in Greece.

Poland too. In our country they can't get away with it. Even at night when it's dark, we go after the Junkers. Our night fighters aren't at all bad.

*July 23.* Captain Leonid Mikhailov got into a fight over German-occupied territory. They got him. Following Nikolai Castello's example, Mikhailov crashed into an enemy tank column. He died, but he took a couple of tanks with him.

No, the fame of Russian arms will not grow dim!

How well it was put: "We have something to defend, we have the means with which to defend it, and we have the people to do the defending."

Reading about these aerial combats a cold shiver runs down my spine and excitement chokes me. Will I get a chance at the enemy soon?

*August 17.* We've been posted to a special bomber formation. The commander, a colonel, makes a good impression. The men say he's an ace. He's got a splendid knowledge of aerial technique.

*August 20.* What rotten luck we have! Again training and practice. After all there's a limit to our patience. Naively enough we thought that since our's was a special formation we would be carrying out specially important missions. Instead it smacks of school here all over again. I'm instructing fliers from the civil air service who've been called up from the reserve. In peacetime I'd really be keen on coaching them. But right now I can't. I simply can't. I'm simply eaten up with the blues and envy of those who take off on a fighting machine with full bomb racks.

*August 21.* I handed in a request to be transferred to operational service. The Colonel just smiled and tossed my request into the waste-paper basket.

"Patience, lad, patience!" he said. "The war won't be over in a day. Your turn'll come. I'm just as anxious to pitch into things myself, but orders are orders, and I have to fuss around with you fellows. Nothing to be done about it. I just have to grin and bear it, have to carry out orders."

"Victor Talalikhin's already a Hero of the Soviet Union," said I, fishing around for some argument. "He's only a year older than me."

"A year's a lot, Comrade Sub-Lieutenant," said the Colonel, his eyes sparkling with laughter. "I hope that in a year you'll be flying too."

"But suppose the war ends before then?"

"In that case you'll just have to write it down as bad luck for you."

"Victor Talalikhin's been flying for a long time already. He even had a crack at the Finns. He was decorated with the Order of the Red Star for his services in the Finnish campaign."

"Is that so! So young and so early! It happens, it happens. You can't always gauge a man by his age. Nikolai Dobrolyubov wrote such clever articles at seventeen that it's hard to believe that he was the author. That's what you call talent by the grace of God. Talalikhin, Titenkov and the rest are talented fellows. That's why they're operational. And what are you? Three times nothing. In the American Air Force they call chaps like you 'Dumb Joe.'"

"May I go, Comrade Colonel?"

"You may."

I felt as if I had just come out of a steambath. I was simply boiling.



BEFORE THE TAKE-OFF

*Oil Painting by A. Zogorov*



ALEXANDER MOLODCHY

*Oil Painting by the Kukrinski*

*August 23.* I feel like writing a letter to Stalin. I wonder if he knows that they're not letting us youngsters get into things? I swear we wouldn't fight worse than the "old timers"! They should try us, test us. I wrote out one draft of a letter, then another, then a third. But none of them are any good. It has to be written somehow in a special way. Convincingly, short. "Dear Joseph Vissarionovich!" I began the sixth draft. "Understand our unfortunate position. Please give orders for us to be transferred from the preparatory class."

But at that point something occurred to me that had completely slipped my mind when I sat down to write the letter. How am I going to send it? I'm in the Army. I have no right to send a request directly to the People's Commissar of Defence. It's a breach of discipline. Should I send it to my immediate superior? The Colonel would certainly give me a good dressing-down. "You squirt!" he'd say. "How dare you take up the time of the People's Commissar with your idiotic requests! And you only twenty! What do you think you are anyway? When I was your age I thought twice about going to the squadron commander with a request. We'll manage very nicely without your reminders! About turn! Dismiss!"

I put down my pen. Crumpled up the draft. Looks like I'll have to let matters take their own course. Nekrassov complained that fighting interfered with his being a poet, while poetry interfered with his being a fighter. It's youth that's interfering with me. How can I get rid of it? Should I start growing a beard or something?

*August 23.* We're besieging the Colonel with requests to be made operational. He doesn't smile any longer when he talks to us. He gets sore.

"You're too cocksure of yourselves," he said, screwing up his shrewd eyes. "I don't doubt that many of you are brave lads. But bear in mind that not every brave flier makes a good army pilot. A certain designer once said that different types of planes differ just as much in temperament as different horses, and act just as differently when they're in the air. In order to 'break in' a new type of plane an experienced pilot needs as many as thirty hours, but as for you thirty days wouldn't be enough. Do you realize what branch of the air force you're in? You're in the Long Range Bomber Command. Know what that means?"

"You just listen to what wiser people tell you. They say that from now on the calibre of a flier will be judged not by the old standard of 'courage' but the new one of 'knowledge'—knowledge of the plane itself, the milieu in which it moves and everything that has any connection with aeronautics, as, for instance, aerial navigation, radio operation and maintenance, aerodynamics, and so forth. And while this knowledge is desirable for peacetime flying, in wartime it is the deciding factor. Do you know who said that? That was written in a book by Jordanoff, the American specialist."

*September 5.* The situation at the front is serious. Our armies are withdrawing to the East, fighting every inch of the way. The enemy is pushing on Moscow, Leningrad. He has superiority in materiel, and although the German casualties are tremendous, still the fascist horde is crawling for-

ward. The Sovinformbureau communicates about the surrender of towns hurt terribly. In the morning we gather round the loudspeaker and listen in to the communique. I glance at my comrades and see how stern and grave their faces are. It's Russian soil that the enemy is tramping over. It's hard to feel this, to admit it. You hardly hear anyone laughing in the mess. We've grown up somehow and are much quieter than chaps our age usually are.

*September 12.* "Well, Sub-Lieutenant Molodchy," said the Colonel, "I intend letting you get a crack at the Germans soon. Only bear in mind, Dumb Joe, you're a trial balloon. If you don't let us down, I'll permit all the youngsters to go on operational flights. Their fate depends on you."

"I won't let you down, Comrade Colonel," said I hardly able to talk straight. "I've got a swell navigator! Wonderful chap! We'll do a top job of bombing."

"Now that's something I don't like," interrupted the Colonel. "You haven't even taken off and you're already boasting. We'll see what kind of bomber pilots you are. Hold yourself in readiness. Have a look at the newspaper clippings about the operations of our aircraft. You can get a hint or two from them."

I rushed off to Sergei Kulikov, my navigator, without feeling the ground under my feet. I told him about my conversation with the Colonel. First thing he did was to shout "Hurrah!" then he smiled and said quietly:

"We'll show them the stuff we're made of!"

"We've got to," said I.

*September 18.* Mission: to bomb the German garrison in the town of P. We set off alone. Low ceiling. Keen wind. Seryozha navigated by instrument. In the vicinity of our target we came down to a low level. Wheeled around for twenty minutes, but not a glimpse of the town did we get, just as if the ground had swallowed it up.

What happened next is hard to understand, but we slipped over the town without managing to release our bombs. It sprang into view so suddenly that we were too late. We should have unloaded on the run. The streets jammed with soldiers flashed by as on a screen. I could see tanks, trucks, carts, horses, the high German waggons covered over with tarpaulin. Columns of soldiers in greyish-green greatcoats. They were either at parade or holding a meeting. Couldn't have been a better opportunity for a blow from the air. The ack-acks were silent. How come? Did they take us for a friendly plane?

"Sashka! There they are!" yelled Seryozha. "Hell! We've let them go!"

"I see," I answered. "Where'll they go to?"

On the outskirts of the town I veered round in order to come in over the central square. There was a burst of flak and then all the cannon and machine guns of the AA defence set up a furious barking. Shells were bursting all around. Splinters whistled. Our plane rocked on the waves of the blasts.

The infantry columns were still standing on the streets and in the square without stirring. No one took cover. We hadn't dropped our bombs or

opened machine-gun fire on our first sweep so apparently they took us for a scout. So much the worse for them.

"Take to starboard, skipper," came Sergei's muffled voice on the intercom.

I turned as requested. Seryozha unloaded over the square. Explosions followed one after the other. Smack into the thick of them. Panic in the streets. The officers and men who hadn't been hit ran into yards and side-streets. What a shame that I was alone! If only I had another three sections of bombers with me we'd have made mincemeat of those Germans.

The flak was terrific. A ring of batteries surrounded the town. All the anti-aircraft fire in the place was concentrated on us. Unfortunately the clouds had dispersed and the Germans were able to take aim. In front, to the right, to the left—walls of fire. Would they actually get us? Would this be our first and last operational flight?

I did two steep turns, dived, shot up. But it was impossible to get through the flak. I had to bamboozle them somehow. Keeling over on a wing I began to hurtle down. The ruse succeeded. The flak stopped. They thought they had me. I pulled up just over the roofs of the suburban houses, levelled out and zoomed into the clouds. The Germans realized what had happened and the ack-ack opened again. This time, however, the shells were bursting far behind and off the mark. I continued to climb until I was out of the danger zone. My heart became light as a feather. I felt like singing, shouting, jumping with joy. The enemy had sustained tremendous losses. We'd sent several hundred officers and men to the other world. And we ourselves had come out alive, unscathed. That's what is meant by the short, ringing word "victory." I could hear Seryozha's boyishly excited voice on the intercom:

"Congratulations, Sasha! Not so bad for a beginning."

The little light on the pneumatic mailbox twinkled. I took out a note. Vassilyev and Panfilov were also congratulating me and the navigator. They'd put three exclamation marks after every sentence. The boys were mad with delight.

"Why didn't you clean up the streets with your machine guns?" I answered them. "Waiting for orders? Now, now, I'm surprised at you!"

"Slipped up, Comrade Sub-Lieutenant," they replied. "We were on the lookout for fighters upstairs. Clean forgot about the floor. We'll remember after this. Word of honour as Y.C.L. members!"

Landed at base all safe and sound. Scrambled out of the plane. Seryozha gripped my hand. Vassilyev and Panfilov hugged me in turn. Their faces were terribly excited, their eyes burning.

"Congratulations, Comrade Lieutenant!" said Panfilov. "Our baptism of fire has been a success. Tried and tested we are! From now on the devil himself won't get us. Before taking off I must admit I was a little scared, but it's all gone now. We can strafe the Germans. We'll go up tomorrow and give it to them even hotter."

"Now, now," said I sternly, recalling how the Colonel had sat on me for boasting. But I couldn't repress a smile. "Don't you go giving yourselves airs, my friends! What we did today was only beginner's luck. The test is still ahead of us."

"Nothing of the sort! The most important thing is to begin," interrupted Seryozha. "After that things'll go smooth as butter. I swear it will, Sasha! I prophesy a glorious future for our crew."

We looked over the plane. Good heavens, they'd certainly holed it! The rudder and fuselage were simply riddled with bullet and splinter "wounds." Direct hits on the wings had made holes big enough for a water-melon to get through. The ground mechanic came up shaking his head.

"Pretty hot, eh, fellows?" he asked.

"It's all over whatever it was," replied Seryozha. "It's war, brother. We gave 'em something to put in their pipes too. If we're going to balance losses, the bill'll be in our favour."

"As long as it's in your favour, then everything's fine," agreed the mechanic. "You were lucky. The Germans seem to have hit spots that weren't vulnerable. We'll have the kite fixed up in two or three days and then you can take her up again."

After that we went to Headquarters to make our report.

*September 20.* The Colonel kept his word. All the "youngsters" have received permission to take part in operational flights.

In the morning I flew out to bomb a concentration of enemy mobile troops. The weather was good and it was an easy trip. Mission accomplished.

Over there, on the other side of the frontline, they think of us, wait for us impatiently, bless every blow at the enemy. How soon before we free those unfortunate cities and villages?

*September 21.* My first night flight into the enemy camp. We bombed military objectives in the town of P. Anti-aircraft guns opened fire at us as we crossed the front and in the target area. I was decidedly uncomfortable. The explosions came pretty close. It looked as if every shell coming from the ground was heading straight for us. I took every star on the horizon for the light of an enemy fighter plane. Seryozha acted like a brick. He kept teasing me and the gunners.

"Those are only the blossoms, fellows," he consoled us, "the fruit is still ahead."

*September 23.* Bombed the railway station at the town of V. I was leading the section. On nearing the target I gave orders to break formation because of the clouds and every man to act on his own. I was the first to sweep over the target. The AA guns were silent. Seryozha placed the bombs on a munitions train. Explosions and fires. The ack-acks opened up. My whole section was pounding the echelons. Then we sheered away from the station and headed for home. Our engines were humming victoriously: "All's well, all's well." Ahead of us lie battles.

*September 24.* We bombed the railway station of U. As we were running up to the target two Messers attacked us. Panfilov opened accurate fire at them and kept them at a "decent" distance. Manœuvring, I began my bombing run. We were over the target. The bombs fell among the cars and locomotives. There must have been something highly inflammable there. Columns of flame shot skyward. Then we set our course for home. The enemy fighters tagged along, but did not risk coming closer. Cowardly gangsters!



"We're flying under escort," joked Seryozha. "Panfilov, send those Messers a radiogram: 'We welcome such louts, two to one and scared!'"

*September 28.* We bombed the railway junction at the town of P. Flew out alone. Daytime. Furious light and heavy flak. There was a regular whirlwind of fire around the aircraft. The gunners opened up machine-gun fire at ground targets. Flames enveloped the station. Seryozha placed his bombs with amazing accuracy. Barrage Messers took to the air. Plunging into the clouds I left the firing zone. The Messers did not follow.

*October 4.* A night raid. We bombed the aerodrome in the town of V. The operation was successful. We observed direct hits among the grounded Junkers and Fockes. The hangar was set on fire. The gasoline tank and auxiliary structures went up in flames. The flak was heavy. But it doesn't make me nervous any more, as it did during my first sorties. I put my faith in my machine, it does what I want it to do. I took evasive action so that the shells always burst either behind or in front of me.

Seryozha still grumbles that I "forget myself" over the target and either shoot over too fast or go too slow.

"You're giving me one hell of a job," says he. "Placing a bomb on the target is not like peppering a rabbit with a shotgun. If you deviate the least bit, the devil only knows where it lands. Pull yourself together, pal. So far I'm asking you like a friend. But if you don't mend your ways I'll have to speak to the Commander. He'll bawl you out proper."

After that he took a sheet of paper, drew a plan and explained to me all there was to know about running up on a target.

*October 10.* I've become a "night bird." From now on I'll be flying in the daytime only as an exception. You can go farther and bomb more successfully at night, with no fear of encountering Messers or Heinkels. Last night I bombed an aerodrome in the town of M. We smashed a huge hangar with a direct hit. Crippled a large number of Junkers. Set gasoline tanks on fire.

*October 11.* Fine weather. Bombed the railway station at C. Explosions and fires. The flak became very intense after we dropped our bombs. I took violent evasive action. I was dripping with perspiration as a result of the strain. Seryozha's cheerful voice piped up on the intercom:

"The Fritzes are in a temper, Sasha! Tomorrow we'll let them have some more. We really have to visit such hospitable hosts more often."

"They've had their fill," said I. "They won't be able to put to rights what we've smashed up in a month of days."

"You're getting better," said he. "The way you took me over the target today couldn't have been better. Keep at it, my boy, and keep cool."

*October 12.* Bombed a railway junction and concentration of troop trains scheduled for the Moscow direction. Feels good to sprinkle bombs on the enemy! We bombed from a low altitude. We could see soldiers tumbling out of the flaming cars.

"Come on, boys, give 'em a taste of something hot!" I ordered the gunners.

"Yes, sir, something hot for the Germans!" replied Panfilov.

Returned to base and reported on the accomplishment of our mission. I asked for permission to make a second sweep.

"How did you manage to take off?" they asked me in Headquarters. "Not a single plane can get up."

"Molodchy's a magician," smiled the adjutant. "He hypnotizes the engines."

*October 14.* Bombed a motorized column. Seryozha's a sniper-bomber. He puts his treats down wherever he has a mind to. We've acquired quite a lot of experience in bombing columns. At first the Germans used to move along the roads without any anti-aircraft defences. Our aircraft, especially our attack planes, have made them abandon this habit of taking "joy rides" over Russian territory. They've become "wiser," more cautious. Now they've concentrated anti-aircraft guns at the head and tail of their motorized and tank columns. Their anti-aircraft gunners keep wide awake on the march and at bivouacs. Before the Germans used to move whenever they chose. Now they prefer to move only at night. In the daytime they "rest" in the woods, in gullies or in the underbrush.

We manage to ferret them out everywhere. The anti-aircraft barrage obliges us to be more careful, but it doesn't keep us from carrying out our assignments. Sometimes we drop two or three bombs on the battery at the head of the column as we sweep over, and after we smash it we rake the column from a low level.

Seryozha keeps score of the number of truckloads of infantry, tanks, grounded aircraft, railway cars and locomotives we demolish. He gets sore when there's any difficulty about recording exactly what's been smashed in our target area. For example, we let a bomb fly into a railroad station building. What damages were done there? How many men perished in the explosion? Was the station dislocated for long? What was there to write down? A guess—no facts.

*October 22.* An important mission. Our course lay to the northwest. We made particularly careful preparations for this sortie. Our aircraft was in topnotch condition. And suddenly, about mid-way to our destination, something went wrong with the starboard engine. At first wisps of smoke began to rise from it, then a tongue of flame appeared. I tried to extinguish it by sideslipping, but doing aerobatics with a bomb load is not easy. Nothing came of my attempts.

"Spontaneous combustion," said Seryozha. "It's a bad business."

From the engine the fire spread to the wing. Smoke began to seep into the cockpit. I ordered Seryozha to jettison the bombs. We were still flying over our own territory. The bombs plunked into a peat bog. I turned back. We were beginning to lose altitude. Flames were licking the whole plane. I ordered the crew to bale out. Vassilyev and Panfilov jumped.

"Are you jumping too, Sasha?" asked Seryozha.

"No, I'm going to try to save the plane," I answered.

"The tanks'll blow up and you'll be burned to death."

"We'll see!"

"I'm staying with you," announced Seryozha. "If we burn, we burn together. I'm not going to leave you alone in the aircraft."

"Navigator Kulikov, I order you to bale out immediately!" I shouted at the top of my lungs. "I'll have you court-martialed if you disobey my orders."

"Yes, Comrade Lieutenant," he replied. "But, Sasha, you. . . ."

"Jump, and no back talk," I repeated.

I waited a while. He was fussing around with something for a suspiciously long time. Seems the door had jammed. It was impossible to open it. Seryozha took a swinging kick at it and then another. It flew open and from a height of one hundred and eighty metres he leaped to the ground.

There it was, the forced landing.

I kept looking around for a suitable landing place. Nothing in sight. Woods, shrubbery, hills. Behind was a peat bog. There was no time to be lost. The tail plane was on fire. The aircraft was listing heavily. Somehow I managed to bring her as far as a field. My clothes flared up on me. I brought the plane down near some hayricks. The starboard wing was caught by one of those damn ricks. The aircraft turned abruptly, and my head bumped into the wall of the cockpit. Blood gushed from my temple. I opened the hood and crawled out of the burning machine. There was no hope of extinguishing the flames. I crawled off. A minute later and just as Seryozha had foretold, the tanks blew up. Thick black smoke rose over the plane. It burned like a torch. I grit my teeth. I felt like crying.

Kulikov, Panfilov and Vassilyev came running up. They were a terrible sight. Their boots, their flying togs and their helmets were all plastered with mud. The poor chaps had plumped into a bog and were drenched to the skin. They must have been frozen. I suggested that they take their things off and dry them near the blazing remains of the aeroplane.

"Oh, we're all right," said Panfilov, his teeth chattering. "But what about you? Didn't break a leg or something, did you? Well, thank heaven! We ran for all we were worth, but we didn't really think we'd find you alive."

They bandaged up my head. Then we discussed the direction in which to proceed. Two youngsters came up just then. Seemed we'd landed in the Rostov District of the Yaroslavl Region. There was a village not far off. The youngsters invited us to their house. With a last wistful glance at the smouldering plane I said:

"Let's go."

There were a lot of evacuated Leningradites in the village, among them a woman doctor. She washed and bandaged my temple. She said the skull was whole. Seems there was no crack. She ordered me to stay in bed for a few days. I was terribly anxious to get to town so that we could set out for our base from there.

"In the name of the Soviet Government," said the doctor, "I order you to remain where you are, Comrade Lieutenant. Absolutely no movement."

We sent a telegram to Headquarters, giving them our bearings. Asked for first aid. They put me to bed on the sleeping shelf over the oven. The collective farmers began bringing in milk, cream and eggs, stuffing us until

we were ready to burst. Every one of them insisted that we try what he had brought. The members of my crew sat around the table, their faces purple, hardly able to move their jaws.

"Comrade Commander," reported gunner Vassilyev, "we'll pass out with this hospitality. Save us if you can."

The next day the Colonel himself came to us on a Douglas. I wondered why the honour. The Wing Commander in person picking up the stranded crew of a wrecked plane! But in a twinkling everything was made clear. The day before an Ukase of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. decorating the crew had been published. I was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and decorated with the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal. Navigator Sergei Kulikov received the Order of Lenin, Panfilov and Vassilyev—Orders of the Red Star. We felt both embarrassed and terribly pleased.

The Colonel congratulated us and made a short speech. Now we have to pound the enemy even harder. The high award obliges us to fly farther and bomb more accurately and more furiously.

"That goes without saying, Comrade Colonel," Seryozha replied for all of us. "We'll never be out of debt to our country. We will not grudge our lives. I think you know us a bit, and you can believe us."

"I do," smiled the Colonel. "If I didn't have faith in you, I wouldn't have come here to pick you up."

We boarded the Douglas. The collective farmers came out to see us off. They waved their hands and wished us a happy journey. The heavy machine taxied out and left the ground smoothly. We were off for home.

At the aerodrome everyone congratulated us. They had worried all night, waiting for us to come back. Many of them thought it was all over with us. One or two had even had a drink for our departed souls.

"You devils!" said Sub-Lieutenant Garanin as he threw his arms round my shoulders. "All the things we thought of in the course of those twenty-four hours! Waiting and waiting and never a sight of you. We were sure you were done for. Just imagine, to die on that day of all days! Without knowing about the decorations! What a rotten trick that would have been! You certainly are bricks to come back all safe and sound! We're going to toss you now. And then you'll have to stand us to champagne!"

*October 29.* We flew out on a Douglas to get our new machines. They are a new type and we'll have to find out what there is to know about them and go through a conversion course. The crew is disgruntled. Being sent to the rear again. Even in the old bus we didn't do a bad job of combing the Fritzes. What else do they want? I felt as badly as if I'd been given an official reprimand. We took our places in the big belly of the Douglas and sat there as gloomy and depressed as if we were going to a funeral. There is only one consolation: the new aircraft will be better than the old. And we'll make up for lost time.

*November 2.* We got our new aircraft. Looks like a pretty good bomber at first sight. We'll see how it shows up in action.



THE FIRST TO BREAK THROUGH

*Oil Painting by Sergei Godyna (Grekov Studios)*



FORCING THE DNEPER AT DNEPRODZERZHINSK

*Oil Painting by Rostislav Gore'ov (Grckov Studios)*

*November 6.* Heard Stalin's speech over the radio. The impression it made is difficult to convey. We stood around the loudspeaker with bated breath, afraid to miss a single word. What soberness, wisdom and force there is in that speech! Not the slightest attempt to gloss over the gravity of the situation at the front, yet it proves that the ultimate defeat of the Germans is inevitable. Stalin's voice came over very clearly. He spoke calmly and evenly, but in this external calm lay tremendous explosive power, a fiery passion that reached every one of us, moving and kindling us.

Stalin spoke of our great predecessors, and we felt that we were indeed the descendents of Dmitri Donskoy, Alexander Nevsky, Minin and Pozharsky, Suvorov and Kutuzov. We felt that we were Russians, people who know no fear in battle with the enemies of our country, who spare neither life nor limb in the fight. As if the lousy Hitler gang can get the better of us! I should say not!

1942

*January 15.* We've come back to the squadron. Operational work has begun. In the daytime we bombed a railway bridge. Visibility was good. We could see our target plainly. Seryozha dropped a thousand kilogram H.E. and . . . missed. What rotten luck. We came back simply furious. Didn't say a word the whole day.

*January 18.* Off to bomb the same bridge again. The ack-ack gunners met us with a hurricane of fire. I overshot the target without unloading. What were we to do? After all our aircraft's not a dive bomber. All the same we decided to dive. I went into a dive from an altitude of a thousand metres. We hurtled down towards the ground. Three hundred metres left to go. Two hundred.

"Sashka!" shouted Seryozha. "That's not the right bridge, devil take it! . . ."

I flattened the plane out and broke through the curtain of flak.

"What's the idea of bringing us to the wrong place?" I demanded. "Think it's a joke, diving?!"

"My error, Comrade Commander," replied Seryozha briefly.

We looked for the "right" bridge. Found it. Dived again. Dropped a delayed action bomb from an altitude of two hundred metres and flew off to a distance of about two kilometres. A blast roared near the bridge, but the bridge continued standing as if nothing had happened.

"Seryozha!" I yelled. "I'm beginning to be disappointed in you. You've let a ton of explosives fizzle out for nothing. You can make a mistake once, but two times running is just a little too much!"

"It's easier to shoe a tiger than to bomb these bridges," grumbled Seryozha's voice on the intercom. "We'll try again tomorrow. If I don't hit home, I'll hand in my resignation. Then look for another navigator."

We never got a chance to settle up with that "fatal" bridge. It was wrecked by Sub-Lieutenant Garanin, who was following us.

Suddenly I noticed that the gas was leaking. Seems a shell splinter had pierced the pipe-line. I brought the ship back to friendly territory with difficulty. Had to make a forced landing about five minutes flying time from the X aerodrome. Brought the plane down safely.

"What a day!" sighed Seryozha. "Didn't accomplish our mission. Didn't manage to reach base. Flops all round! It's a damn disgrace!"

*January 24.* I led a formation of nine planes. We headed for the town of N. Our Intelligence had received information that about two hundred German bombers were concentrated there in readiness for a raid on Moscow. Our mission was to attack beforehand, scotching the enemy's designs.

We flew in close formation. It was a sunny day. Under the wings the snow gleamed dazzlingly. We swept in over the target from the direction of the sun. They weren't expecting us there at all. The AA woke up when Seryozha unloaded and all nine aircraft were dispersed over the target. When I pulled up I could see the bombs released by our nine falling and bursting. The boys did a good job. Fragments of bomb-mangled Junkers flew into the air together with showers of earth. The hangar and gasoline tank were in flames. Someone had plastered the Dispersal Point with a bomb. Another bomb fell on the repair workshop.

I made another sweep over the aerodrome. I was anxious to see the results of the bombing. Everything on the ground was burning. At least twenty Junkers had been wrecked. The aerodrome has been dislocated for a long time. German fliers and ground crews were scattering all over the field. Our boys were peppering them with their machine guns.

The anti-aircraft gunners kept up a desperate fire. Nevertheless all nine planes, having dropped their bombs, set their course for home. My port engine had been damaged by splinter and had conked out. The plane was trembling and rocking.

"Will we make it back?" asked Seryozha.

"We've got to make it," said I. "Nothing terrible the matter. There are no Messers in sight."

I gave Vassilyev and Panfilov orders to keep their eyes peeled for German fighters. We began to lose speed. The planes I was leading slowed down for me and covered me on the sides. Finally we crossed to friendly territory. I landed on a reserve flying field. The operation had been carried out not badly. According to information received from Intelligence Service sources, services for a dead flier had been taking place in the Dispersal Point at the time we made our raid. A certain ace was being eulogized. The whole commanding staff was there. Our bombs had wiped out forty enemy air officers.

*January 25.* I was working at the table while Seryozha was lying on the sofa and reading some tattered book in a green cover. Suddenly he jumped up and exclaimed:

"Sasha! Just a minute. Listen to this!"

"I'm listening."

As solemnly and loudly as if he were reading to an audience of thousands he read to me:



"To deliver up millions of men, superior minds, scientists, even geniuses, to the caprice and will of a being who, in an instant of gaiety, madness, intoxication, or love, would not hesitate to sacrifice everything for his exalted fancy, will spend the wealth of the country amassed by others with difficulty, will have thousands of men slaughtered on the battlefields, all this appears to me, a simple logician, a monstrous aberration.' Pretty good, eh?"

"Swell!" I agreed. "About Hitler? Eh?"

"You certainly hit the nail on the head!" said Seryozha bursting out laughing. "That's Maupassant, brother, 'The Sundays of a Parisian'!"

Somewhat embarrassed, I laughed too.

"Not so long ago I gave a talk on Hitlerism," said Seryozha. "I was asked why Hitler is burning the classics. I answered that fascism was the enemy of culture in general and so on. But what I should have done was to read this page from Maupassant. It would have answered the purpose better. Pity I didn't get hold of this book before. This is one straight in the eye for crazy Adolf. There isn't a single classic in which he can't find a crack at himself. That's why he got so raving mad and gave orders to burn them all. Freaks don't keep mirrors in their houses. A mirror reminds them of their freakishness and only irritates them."

Then Seryozha took out his notebook and copied the quotation. Feeling extremely pleased with himself he began to walk around the room whistling an aria from "Carmen."

Seryozha's boyhood friend, Kolya D., has come to visit him. He is a fighter pilot. Medium height, broad-shouldered, blue-eyed. Burly athletic build. They had an argument. Kolya swaggered a bit and sang praises to the fighter planes.

"Come on over to us," he said to Seryozha. "We're the part of the air force that does the punching. The real rulers of the sky. And what are you? Dray horses. The common labourers in the flying family! 'No tales will be told about you, no songs sung.' But fighters are being extolled by the poets day after day."

"Now, now, brother, you're laying it on a bit thick!" said Seryozha in a huff. "Of course everything you do is showy. Fly out, catch up with a Junkers or a Focke, get on his tail, down him. And then the fuss begins, Newspaper photographers come flocking, movie operators grind away, the papers write about you. The whole country sees the results. The aircraft you shoot down are put in public squares for everyone to see and touch. But our work is more prosaic. We fly into the German rear. Without photographers. And very often we have no proof of where we've dropped our bombs. No one knows, no one sees. Sometimes we go on raids about which you can't even write three words in the newspaper because it's a military secret. Even the other chaps in our own squadron don't know about it. But what of it? We're helping our country, aren't we? Well, and that's good enough. And you say dray horses."

"Don't boast," interrupted Kolya. "I'm sure a camel also has a high opinion of himself. We know you."

"What do you know?" snapped Seryozha. "To make a comparison with

the Navy, you're the cutters while we're the battleships. Which is weightier?"

"And what about ramming? You've seen how we ram!"

"I have. Very well, that's heroism. Only don't forget you can do your ramming over friendly territory. You just try flying into the German rear with your ramming. Suppose you crack up. Where you going to bale out to? Think that one out. It's at short range you show your skill."

"Mileage doesn't prove anything."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Seryozha. "Hold me, Sasha, I'm liable to poke him one!"

"I'll poke the both of you," says I to them. "Starting up shop jealousy. You're both talking gibberish. After the war we'll add up accounts and see who crippled the most Germans."

They both stared at me and then smiled.

*February 15.* For the last ten days we've been supporting the offensive of our ground forces. We're striking at the forward fringe of the German defences, at their reserves. Sometimes we make two sweeps in twenty-four hours: one at night and one in the daytime. The enemy fighters are active. They cover the positions of their forces, but they avoid engaging us. During these days we watched the work of our attack planes. They're daring fellows who fly those "IL-2's." They go ground-hopping almost on the heads of the Fritzes.

The German ack-acks simply can't adjust their fire to the attack planes. The small, swift craft steal up unobserved. They tear out of the woods or some ravine like a cyclone. Then they rain down bombs and stitch away with their machine guns. After them—columns of smoke. I like watching them.

*February 16.* We're resting. I'm writing letters to my wife, my relatives and friends. Seryozha's latest distraction is poetry. When he's carried away by anything he gets to be like one possessed. Every time he comes across a good piece of verse, a vivid stanza or a striking metaphor he absolutely must read it out loud.

"No, but you just listen, Sashka," he says. "So help me God, it's wonderful! Just listen."

And I have to listen even though our tastes don't coincide. What he gets so excited over doesn't always move me. But it's impossible to argue with him at such times. He flares up and begins being sarcastic. Calls me an ignoramus, an ass, a creature utterly incapable of understanding the heavenly beauty of poetical language. You simply have to agree and give in. The other day he walked around with Longfellow's "Hiawatha." Today it's Kipling.

"Sasha, listen!" he yelled, shaking the book. "A simply marvellous passage!

"By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea.

There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me;

For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say:

'Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to Mandalay!'"

He finished and looked at me questioningly.

"Well, what do you say, Your Highness, King of the Air? Maybe after the war we should fly to Mandalay? See the girls from Burma. Take a squint at the elephants."

"Look here, Seryozha," said I, "best thing you could do would be to go on the stage after the war. You'd make a wonderful music hall performer. You recite superbly. Besides by the end of the war you'll have at least five decorations strung across your chest. A master of elocution with five decorations—that's an advertisement for you! Success will be assured. The public will come flocking. People'll think you got your decorations for your masterly rendition of poetry."

"No, but really, Sasha, you have absolutely no ear at all," he said laughing. "To you poetry is just gibberish. But as a matter of fact it stimulates, restores your spiritual equilibrium. After reading this particular bit I feel as refreshed as if I'd taken a dip in the river."

"But will you go on the stage?"

"I will, but on the one condition that you come with me as Master of Ceremonies. Master of Ceremonies: Alexander Molodchy, Hero of the Soviet Union. That'll be something, brother! Tickets will be at a premium. Every performance will get a write-up in the papers. We'll be able to get a Douglas all to ourselves and travel from town to town only by air. The reporters will write: The famous elocutionist Sergei Kulikov, reciter of Rudyard Kipling and Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, has flown to Igarka or Namanagan accompanied by Master of Ceremonies so-and-so for his next regular performance. OK!"

In this way, drawing fantastic pictures of our future life, we fooled away an hour or two. Seryozha was in high form. His imagination was working like sixties. But it was time for dinner. We went for a short walk before going in to eat. There was a light frost. Over us a clear sky. On either side of the path were frost-covered maples and poplars. The newly fallen snow sparkled and gleamed. Seryozha recalled Kipling again.

He already knew the poem by heart. His voice grew louder and louder as he recited it. Passersby turned round to look at us. I could see smiles on their faces.

"Seryozha," said I, "you're compromising the Air Force."

"Why, what's up?" he asked, looking down at himself. "My uniform's all right."

"Try keeping quiet for a bit. There are people all around. They're liable to take us for poets in disguise."

"What an ideal!" he grumbled, lighting a cigarette. "Do we really have to talk about pancake landings and throttles all the time? Since we're resting now, we ought to give our minds as well as our bodies a rest."

*February 17.* Bombed a marshalling yard in the town of N. As we were approaching the target a fighter intercepted us. It was a bright night. Heavy clouds. We were flying at an altitude of 2,800 metres. The fighter was firing long-range bursts. He had the bright idea of trying to drive us away from the target. I plunged into the clouds. He climbed after us.

I went in to the target from another direction. Again the fighter appeared

in front of us. He was coming on boldly to meet us. An ace, no doubt. By the way he manœuvred I could see that he certainly knew how to handle a ship. Seryozha let him have a burst in the nose. The fighter took evasive action. "Didn't like it?" I came down and began to skim low in order to take cover in the bluish ground haze and manœuvre for a run-up without being seen. But it didn't come off. The fighter dived to intercept us. He came in at us from the side. I took evasive action. Managed to get him within range of the machine-gun fire of the gunners. He began to climb. Decided to strike from above. I veered round and made for home. Let him think that we were scared and had beat a retreat.

We returned to the target. Again the fighter attacked. A long-drawn-out game of manœuvring began. We shot up and he after us. We came down and he began skimming low. Still he realized that we weren't an easy nut to crack and took care to keep out of the range at which Panfilov and Vassiliev could have stitched him up with lead.

The poor fellow tried to wear us out, but what happened was just the opposite. He was played out first and backed out, having exhausted his ammunition. True we also came in for our share from him. I was drenched. My shirt stuck to my back. Competing in manœuvres with a fighter is a pretty stiff job. On the return trip it can be managed somehow, but with a bomb load it's real hot work I must say.

Having rid ourselves of the ace, we unloaded with the greatest of pleasure,

*February 20.* A Government Ukase decorating me with the Order of the Red Star has been published.

*February 22.* I was on my way back from a sortie. The weather was rapidly growing worse. Icing began. Our antenna damaged and radio not working. We couldn't ask for a "fix." No contact with the ground. Tried to make a landing on an aerodrome in the vicinity of Moscow. Fog veiled everything from view. Impossible to make a landing. We proceeded to another aerodrome. Fog there too. Couldn't land. Asked Seryozha what he thought we ought to do. Our fuel was giving out.

"Let's try to get through a little further North," he advised. "Most likely there's no fog there. Set course for X. There's an excellent aerodrome there."

"Let's go," I replied. "Come what may."

Our gas was just melting away. We were squeezing all we could out of it. What if we didn't reach the place we were heading for and would have to ground just anywhere? The damn fog had covered the whole ground. Every minute the icing was getting heavier. Nothing came of our efforts. We were flying by instrument. Under us a snowy blanket gleamed. No fog. Good visibility.

No more gasoline. We didn't have time to pick and choose a landing place. Without lowering the undercarriage I came down on a clearing in the woods. Deep, powdery snow. Made a decent landing even though . . . just three metres in front of us loomed a century-old pine. Just a little bit further and it would have been curtains for us.

We scrambled out. We began kidding each other about our sorry plight.

We took out our emergency rations and had a drink all round. Then we had a bite to eat. It was getting on for dawn. Quiet in the woods. Could hear the trees crackling in the frost. Finally we came to a railway line and a small station. The train for Moscow would be along soon. Everything would be fine. We would march into base.

The red eye of a locomotive glowed down the track. A train pulled in. We boarded it. The passengers kindly offered us seats.

"Didn't have a forced landing, did you?" asked a stocky lieutenant with a weather-beaten face.

"That's about it," replied Seryozha. "A horse moves on solid ground and even then it stumbles sometimes."

*March 20.* Vassili Grechishkin, Hero of the Soviet Union, set out to bomb the enemy rear. The crew unloaded successfully. Then they headed for base. As they crossed the enemy's lines large-calibre artillery opened fire on them. A splinter pierced the fuselage. The instruments went out of commission. The crew kept in touch with one another through notes. It was a dark night. Cloudy. Couldn't see the ground. Couldn't take bearings by instrument. The plane was flying blind. The fuel was giving out.

The pilot began to come down. No suitable place for a landing. Then he climbed again and ordered the crew to bale out. He did not want to risk the lives of the whole crew. He himself decided to try to land somehow, to save the aircraft.

The navigator and the gunners baled out. The pilot did not succeed in making a landing. One of the engines that had been damaged by anti-aircraft fire blew up and the plane caught fire. Grechishkin tried to extinguish the flames by sideslipping, but nothing came of it. At an altitude of five hundred metres he baled out, seeing that it was impossible to save the plane. His parachute had tangled up in the strap somehow and he could not open it. Thus, with his parachute unopened, the flier fell to the ground and . . . nothing happened.

An unheard of incident in the history of aviation. The snow saved him from death. He landed in a deep snowdrift. He was badly jarred, and shaken up, but that was all! The rest of the crew found their commander not far from the burning aircraft. He was sitting in the snow, the blood trickling from his ears. The next day the whole crew returned to their base.

There's no killing us airmen.

*March 21.* Tomorrow my whole crew is going on leave. I'm also going to Kzyl-Orda to spend some time with my wife and daughter. Before we go on leave we're going to bomb a German aerodrome.

"And suddenly we'll crack up just before the happy event," wisecracked Vassilyev. "Or we'll make a forced landing somewhere near the front and have to walk the rails back to our base from there. That would be something!"

"Shut up!" snapped Panfilov angrily. "I've already sent a telegram home: 'Leaving the 22nd, meet me.' Stop croaking."

"You were in too much of a hurry," teased Vassilyev. "Your family'll come to the station. Your train will come in. You won't be there. And then the worrying'll begin."

Two aircraft set out for the target. I was in the lead. My mission was to set fire to the target and illuminate it. The aerodrome was a big one. It was well defended.

We swept over the target at an altitude of six hundred metres. Searchlights tried to snare us and the flak was heavy. Seryozha dropped his bombs square on the grounded aircraft.

"Pepper them a bit, brothers, before we go off," I ordered the gunners. "And don't be stingy about it."

Vassilyev and Panfilov put out a few searchlights with their machine-gun fire. They let fly at the hangar and the ack-ack battery as well. The flak died down. We dived into the darkness and set off for base.

When we crossed the line of the front, Panfilov's triumphant voice came over the intercom:

"Looks like we'll be going on leave as scheduled in spite of everything. Good thing I sent that telegram after all. But as for Vassilyev no one's going to meet him on the platform. Too much foresight cooked his goose."

"That's where you're wrong," retorted Vassilyev. "I wired my folks before you did!"

*March 23.* Took off on a Douglas for Kzyl-Orda. Seryozha flew to his family in Krasnodar. We took warm leave of each other.

"I'll miss you, you devils," said the navigator to me and the gunners. "Got used to you. The crew's become a second family to me. And I must say we really did get along well. Write to me."

*April 5.* I'm resting here in Kzyl-Orda. I gave a few talks in the schools. Couldn't refuse. A delegation of kids came to me and said: "Do come and tell us about the war, Comrade Hero of the Soviet Union." You talk to them and they sit there quiet as mice, their eyes shining.

"Well, kids, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

Their answer comes in ringing voices:

"Pilots! Tankmen! Snipers!"

The youngsters have many plans and wishes. They'll get their own too. We shall crush the enemy and win a happy life for our children. Meeting these youngsters makes me remember my own school days.

The young aeroplane modeller, Fedya D., asked me to help him with his model. I used to be pretty good at aeroplane modelling myself in my day. I dug back into the past. Went with Fedya out of town, to a field. There we put the model together. We checked up on the centre of gravity. Then we set the control stick so that it was neutral and fastened on the propeller. All was ready.

"Go ahead, Fedya," said I. "Get down on one knee facing the wind. Pick the model up on a level with your eyes, tilt its nose down four or five degrees and after waiting a bit for a lull in the wind let it go with a slight push of your right hand. That'll be our trial flight."

Fedya followed my instructions to the letter. When it was released the model began to gain altitude and then banked. We made an adjustment and then I advised him to push the model only the least bit. After several waverings in a vertical plane the model picked up a certain speed.

"It's off!" cried Fedya excitedly. "My word as a Pioneer, it's off!"

Nevertheless this future fellow pilot of mine, or aeroplane designer who might eventually startle the world with his work, rejoiced too early. The model came down close by. It flew up, jumping like a crow at the impact with the ground.

"Now it's getting cranky again," whispered Fedya in a frightened voice. "And that's how they always are. You work and work. You figure everything out just right, then when you let it go, it nose-dives right into the ground."

After another go at the stabilizer Fedya released the model again. It flew a little better now. I explained to him how to control the direction when the engine wasn't working. We checked up on the symmetry of the port and starboard wings and the position of the keel.

Then I said to Fedya: "Soon the ground will be real dry. Pick yourself a football field and get to work there when the players are gone. Only bear in mind that if your model flies off from your hand at an altitude of two or three metres you mustn't let it nose-dive or else it will break the blades of the screw. You know what 'nose diving' means, don't you?"

"Course I do, Comrade Commander! That's when it goes front end into the ground."

"Good boy! Only see to it you don't nose-dive yourself in life."

"Of course I won't, what do you take me for!" replied Fedya seriously. "I never stumble."

Around dinner time we turned back to town. The air was clear and pure. A big sun shone down over the steppes. A haze lay on the horizon. The ground was damp and spongy. Ploughing will begin soon. Fedya shaded his eyes with his hands and looked up at the larks singing in the sky.

A puzzled frown appeared on his snub-nosed face. Most likely the lad was comparing the larks with the glider and trying to guess the secret of the birds' vertical ascent as they spiraled straight up into the sky.

"What are you interested in besides aeroplane modelling?" I asked him.

"Poetry," he said.

"Do you write?"

"Uh-huh."

"Is it good?"

"Rotten, Comrade Commander. Our school wall newspaper doesn't publish it."

"Nose-diving, eh?"

"Nose-diving," said he with a shy, sweet smile.

We parted when we reached town. I went home. My wife met me reproachfully:

"Where have you been all morning? You've come home for only twenty days and yet you disappear all on your own. Awfully sweet of you, I must say!"

I reported to her on the reasons for my lengthy absence.

She forbade me to go out by myself.

"Alexandra Dmitrievna," said I solemnly, "I thought you'd be bored with us. After all you don't give a hang about aeroplane modelling. I

sometimes lapse into second childhood, like the sinful mortal I am. You're a sober woman."

"I won't forgive you," she declared. "Everything that concerns you interests me. If you go hunting, I want to go with you. If you go fishing, I want to go too. Where you are there I want to be!"

Then she walked up to me and stroking my hair with her plump little hand she asked me softly:

"Isn't it terrifying to be flying out there, Sasha?"

"Sort of, Shurochka," I said with a smile. "But you see our business is afraid or not afraid, pound the Germans. After a while we get used to it."

"All the same, you take care of yourself," she said, gazing into my eyes. "If anything happens . . . what will we do without you? Galka will grow up and ask where her papa is. No, no, I don't even want to think of it."

"Nothing'll happen to us," I said firmly. "Do you know what my navigator said to me: 'The man who'll bring us down hasn't been born yet.'"

She smiled and went into the kitchen to get dinner ready.

*April 6.* How wonderful it is in the steppes in the springtime! Evenings Shura and I go out of town. The sunset lights up the horizon. The moist earth steams. Not a cloud is in the sky. Endless flocks of birds come flying over from the South. Geese, swans, ducks. In the evening hush swift wings rustle. The alarmed cry of cranes carries far and wide.

Occasionally fighting and transport planes fly past overhead. At such times I throw my head back and follow the aircraft through the sky with my eyes until they are out of sight. I get the blues terribly. Most likely I was born for the air. The ground is wonderful, but still it's a bit boring to be on it. It's much jollier at the controls of a plane.

*April 8.* I'm reading Captain Wan-Si's book "Wings of China." It's a remarkable story about Chinese airmen, written with a profound knowledge of the subject. What wonderful people the Chinese are! How gallantly they're fighting in defence of their country. Our papers carry almost no information about the hostilities between Japan and China. Yet terrific aerial combats are taking place there. The fighter aircraft of the Chinese army are dealing the Japanese telling blows. The Chinese pilots are very young. But they're not afraid of the air. They don't know the meaning of fear in a fight.

*May 2.* Back with my squadron again. We're fighting and re-training. Whenever we manage to get a free day or when our aircraft is being patched up we spend the time reading. Today Sergei brought Rudolf Steinmetz's "Philosophy of War" from the library. He sat down at the table beside me and I could see that the book had him going. Either he liked it very much or it was making him furious. I waited for the explosion. And it came! Suddenly he jumped up and slammed the book down on the table.

"What vile rot!"

"What's up?" I asked, foreseeing an amusing time.

"The very idea!" he exclaimed. "Just listen to this hymn to war. According to him war is a manifestation of progress and a benefaction to mankind, devil take it. This enlightened individual considers that the subjugated nations must become the slaves of the victors. Think of it! Slaves! He is



convinced, you see, that slavery is the greatest educational force in history. There isn't a thing that this Dutch Boche didn't manage to say to justify imperialist wars. Seems the main reason for the want and degeneration of the Australian aborigines is . . . 'the absence of conditions leading to war.'

"His advice is not to spare the civilian population during a war. He says straight out: 'The population must be left with only their eyes, so that they can weep, and they must be treated as roughly as possible in order to hasten the conclusion of peace.' Pretty neat, eh? The fascists have certainly mastered this to perfection. They act in accordance with a 'philosophic' exposition!"

After a short silence he added more calmly:

"We're not pacifists. We're not afraid of bloodshed. We can fight when it's necessary. But it's only sadists or the insane who can turn a bloody war into a sport or look for pleasure in a war. I'm a Russian and proud of the fact that there has never been a 'philosopher' like Steinmetz in Russia."

*May 10.* We're bombing German infantry and artillery. The nights are dark. The horizon is not visible. We have to fly by instrument. We unload our bombs at a low altitude. The ack-acks spit oceans of fire. My plane is usually riddled with splinter holes.

*May 11.* We were out on a long and difficult sweep to the town of N. When we had passed the front line and were two hundred kilometres from our target the oil pressure began to fall. We were quite alarmed. What could we do? Should we cut short our flight? If the oil stopped flowing, the engines would blaze up, and then catastrophe. Should we turn back? In any case we would never reach base and would land in the German lines.

I decided to keep going. We flew for about thirty minutes, wondering what would happen. The engines did not catch fire and the aircraft was not losing speed. All was proceeding normally. We began our bombing run over the target. With our hearts in our mouths lest our engines die out at any moment, we swept over the target. Seryozha released the bombs. I felt much better.

We returned to base. Looked over the oil pipes, the oil gauge and the tanks. Everything became clear. The oil was flowing. The trouble was that the gauge had stopped registering and fooled us. The treachery of some of those instruments is enough to wear out even the strongest nerves.

*May 22.* For ten days we have been pounding enemy aerodromes, railway stations, troop concentrations, bridges and river crossings.

*May 23.* We bombed the N. railway station. The weather was bad. We flew blind almost the whole time. We bombed from a low level. There was no flak either before or after we unloaded. Our bombs hit straight home. The station went up in flames.

*June 11.* What a night! On the way to the target I ran into storm clouds. Terrific downpour. The noise of the rain drowned out the roaring of the engines. Water flooded the port engine and it went dead. We were flying on one engine. The temperature was anywhere from freezing to seven below. The carburetor hood iced over. Ice formed on the wings and on the perspex.

"What if the starboard motor conks out?" asked Seryozha.

I gave orders to unload the bombs on a reserve target. This very rarely

happens with us. Our spirits fell. After releasing our bombs we headed East. The weather showed no signs of improving. The port motor was still not working. The plane was listing, keeling over. I was utterly exhausted trying to keep her flying straight. My hands became numb. I was dizzy. Couldn't feel the rudder-bar with the soles of my feet.

"Seryozha, give me a hand," I asked.

He helped me by holding the rudder down so that the plane wouldn't do a belly-flop on me. It was pouring cats and dogs. Heavy clouds. We rocked dreadfully. My back was breaking. I was ready to drop with the strain. Had to bite my lips to keep from falling asleep. At last we got clear of the rain. We flew into a warm stream of air. The ice melted. The dead engine began to work. Once again the plane was as obedient as a horse that had been broken to harness. Seryozha kept up a steady stream of jokes.

We landed on our aerodrome. The Wing Commander congratulated us.

"I was afraid something had happened to you," he said. "Kept looking at my watch all the time. You should have turned back. What was the idea? You're no greenhorns for us to have to order you back to base by radio."

"We're not used to returning with a bomb load," said Seryozha.

*June 30.* For the past fortnight we've been going out in the direction of X. Strafed enemy troops with bombs and machine-gun fire.

*July 6.* During the last days and nights we've been hitting out at enemy man power and bases.

*July 8.* We took off to bomb the aerodrome in N. I was in the leading plane. Several flights followed after me. The C.O. gave me permission to take along flare bombs in addition to H.E.'s. Before we used them only rarely. Our fliers were afraid that when they dropped a flare bomb it would give away the aircraft on its run over the target. In my opinion we ought to make it a rule to use flare bombs.

It was a dark night. No flak. During my first sweep I dropped four flare bombs at different points of the target. They flared up vividly, illuminating the aerodrome. Then I let the high explosives go. By this time the aircraft behind me came up. They attacked the target from all directions. The AA was partially silenced. The bombs wreaked havoc with the target from a middling altitude. The operation passed off successfully.

*July 10.* Bombed a railway station. Dropped flare bombs a little to one side of the station, and they helped to show up a new siding. The Germans had built it as a "storage place" for reserve echelons carrying fuel. We strafed that line all right. Set fire to the oil tanks on the siding. There was a huge conflagration.

"Splendid things, these flare bombs," said the Wing Commander when we reported on the results of the raid. "We'll have to follow your example. From now on my orders are for all crews to take along a few flare bombs on dark nights to illuminate the targets. On group flights the leading aircraft will drop the flare bombs."

"The patent for flare bombs belongs to our crew," Seryozha reminded him. "We were the first to use them successfully on a job."

"OK, OK," laughed the Commander.

*July 11.* We bombed a railway junction. I was in the leading aircraft. Dropped our flare bombs over the target. I came out of the run behind the station. The flare bombs lit up the target. On the second sweep Seryozha dropped the H.E.'s. I took evasive action to get out of the heavy flak. Pulled off to one side.

I made a third sweep over the target. Dropped the remaining flare bombs. To right and left ack-ack guns were barking. The aircraft following me silenced the batteries, pounded the station and the concentration of trains. Columns of fire shot up to the sky.

Then we set our course for home. The gasoline tanks on my machine had been holed by ack-ack splinters. The gasoline was leaking out onto the exhaust pipe.

"We'll blaze up, Sasha," muttered Seryozha. "They've crippled us, the swine!"

The gasoline in the tanks was fast running out. Still we managed to reach base. There were seventy holes in the aircraft. The port wheel was smashed.

*July 16.* Had a busy day. Raids on enemy troops and communications.

*July 17.* I was coming in to our aerodrome. I let down the undercarriage and came down for a landing. Night. Layers of clouds. At an altitude of one hundred metres the gunners opened machine-gun fire. I decided that they'd made a "technical" error. I asked what the hell the matter was. They acted as if they didn't even hear me. The machine guns kept rattling away without let-up.

"German fighter upstairs!" shouted Seryozha.

By then I already realized what had happened myself. The German had opened cannon and machine-gun fire. Our ack-ack guns answered with heavy fire. Pulled up and began to climb. No place to go. We were in the ring of fire together with the Messer. The German was having a tough time, but I wasn't having it any easier. Our ack-ack gunners were anxious to give him a lesson for his brazenness. They'd made up their minds not to let the "visitor" get away alive.

"We've certainly landed between the devil and the deep blue sea," remarked Seryozha. "What a ridiculous situation. They'll get that crazy devil and us too for company."

The Messer got all he deserved. Smoking and gliding, he was coming down to one side. The ack-ack fire stopped. We landed with a sigh of relief. The ship was riddled with splinters. From our own guns!

"What were you giving it to me for?" I asked the AA gunners in the morning. "That's not nice, my friends!"

"Don't you go bringing back a German on your tail!" they laughed. "You shouldn't keep such company!"

*July 20.* Flew to Koenigsberg. This ancient German city, founded by the Teutonic Order during its drive eastward, now serves as an arsenal for Hitler's army, a centre of the German munitions, machine-building and ship-building industries. A city of obscurantism and reaction, it was a recognized hotbed of anti-Soviet intrigue even before the war. We had forgotten nothing. This city was slated to receive the first blow.

The meteorologists predicted bad weather. Nevertheless it was decided to take off. Bad weather has its good points as well: the Germans would not be expecting us, enemy fighters would not be patrolling and the flak would not be so terrific.

Just as I have been doing for some time, I flew alone. Behind me, at long intervals, followed our sections. After Seryozha and I would set fire to and illuminate the targets, the other planes would come up. A cloud bank barred our way. We tried to skirt it by turning South, but we did not succeed. I headed North. Still worse. Seryozha could not see either the ground or the stars.

"We'll have to climb into the clouds," he said.

We were flying blind. Snow had begun to fall. The temperature dropped to a dangerous level—zero to seven degrees below. Ice had begun to form.

I began to climb, for the colder it is the less dangerous. I sent a radio message to the aerodrome: "Continuing flight through cloud bank." We flew into a snowstorm. The snow penetrated into the cockpit. It melted on my face and blinded my eyes. Time dragged. We began to doubt our watches.

"How far are we from the target?" I asked Seryozha. "Seems to me we've already passed it."

"We've still three hundred kilometres and more to go," he consoled me.

"I'm about done up, Seryozha, and as wet as a drenched cat."

"Stick it out, old man. We'll be there soon."

The other members of the crew tried to cheer me up with "shop" jokes.

"We're over Koenigsberg," reported Seryozha, "if I know anything at all about pinpointing. Careful now!"

Our fatigue vanished instantly. Our goal was beneath us, hidden from sight by the clouds. We flew over the target with the express purpose of drawing the enemy's flak and convincing ourselves that we were not mistaken. Sure enough the ground batteries began to speak. Excellent!

We began to come down. I unloaded our bombs. AA shells were bursting in the clouds. Now for home! Our engines were humming cheerfully. Once again we plunged into the clouds. They seemed endless. I headed North. Ran into a storm. We rocked terribly and it was difficult to keep the aircraft under control. I felt dead beat. I took a sniff at some spirits of ammonia and got my thermos flask out. Drank a cup of hot tea with lemon. Felt much better.

We'd been flying with our oxygen masks for some time now. It was impossible to come down to a lower level. We were afraid of icing. The gunners reported:

"Only enough oxygen left for another fifteen minutes."

I gave orders to cut down on the expenditure of oxygen. We shut off the reserve supply. Flying became more and more difficult. I was as sleepy as if I hadn't slept for several days on end. Once again I sniffed the ammonia. We were in the clouds for about eight hours. Flew blind both there and back. At last we crossed the line of the front. Dawn began to break. The clouds dispersed and a bright yellow sun appeared out of the orange-

coloured haze. The ground below us looked like the sea seen through a faint morning mist.

"Life is so good, to live is the goods," remarked Seryozha, quoting Mayakovsky. "And it's good to fly with Molodchy, and good to strafe the Germans. Long live the sun and to hell with the damned Huns!"

We landed on a reserve flying field, rested and refueled. Half an hour later we were back at our own base.

At headquarters we were congratulated. The staff officers said that we had carried out our operation in record time.

"Rough going?"

"Rather," said I, "but we'll do it again tomorrow if necessary. We're as fit as fiddles and just as anxious to give the Fritzes what for!"

July 22. Raided Koenigsberg again. Quiet moonlit night. Still we knew that this flight would not be an easy one. The sky gradually changed. The moon hid from view. We flew into a cloud bank. The clouds lay over the ground in two layers. The first layer reached an altitude of four thousand metres, the second from five to eight thousand. We approached the target between the clouds. The target was gradually narrowing, the clouds wrapping round us like cotton wool. The temperature was falling. Ice was crystallizing on the edges of the wings, the persex, the propeller blades, the tail plane. The air stream had no effect on it. I switched on the de-icer.

Theoreticians say: "With regard to the enemy one of two methods may be adopted. Either you intercept him and engage him or you take evasive action. When it is a question of dealing with icing, however, you can hold to only one method and that is, avoid it." Well, we tried to avoid it. I zig-zagged right and left, but nothing seemed to go right that day. The zone of rotten weather was too big. The extent of our manœuvring was bound up with the extent of our fuel. We decided to push straight ahead.

The plane was vibrating slightly and we could hear knockings. Seryozha put his head out of the cockpit and looked all round. I was worried too. In case of freezing the de-icers are excellent helps. They also help when light coatings of glassy ice form on the wings. But if the ice begins to form around the covering of the de-icer and coats the surface of the wing behind the covering then you have to abandon all hope in the de-icer and "take evasive action." If you don't you'll be the one to pay. The weight of the aircraft will increase catastrophically. The wings will be distorted. The controls and the ailerons become useless. In the course of ten minutes a coating of ice can make the plane uncontrollable and flying dangerous.

I began to gain altitude. The plane climbed unwillingly. Would the de-icers hold out in this duel with nature?

Seryozha advised coming down to a low level. I came down to an altitude of three thousand metres. We hit a warm layer of air. The ice coating began to melt. We kept running into air pockets and rocked terribly. The ground was not visible. It was impossible to take either astronomical or visual bearings, but it seemed to me we were on the right course. Seryozha kept picking up the sounds of radio stations and as ever chose the shortest route accurately.

We had started out in formation, but now I did not see a single aircraft anywhere. It had begun to pour. The clouds were heavily charged with electricity. Lightning flashed first to the right then to the left. The plane was reeling as if punches were landing on it. The thunder was deafening, drowning out the roar of the engines. Soon the rain gave way to big hailstones. Lightning flashed. After each flash it became pitch dark and in the menacing darkness all that could be seen was the electrified metallic parts of the plane. Fiery snakes kept running along the glass and the antenna. Water was streaming into the cockpit.

"How're you feeling, Sasha?" asked Seryozha.

"Not so bad," said I. "Could be worse. Buck up, my lad."

"Hellish weather," he grumbled. "In all the time I've been flying I've never seen such a merry-go-round."

And the "merry-go-round" did not stop. Vertical streams of air were forcing the aircraft down. We kept bouncing up and down rapidly and suddenly. The instruments were trembling and skipping. The aircraft was feeling too much stress.

Lightning kept flashing on all sides.

"Won't it hit the antenna?" asked Seryozha.

"It won't dare," said I trying to cheer him up by joking.

As a matter of fact cases of lightning hitting a plane are rare. But we might accidentally run right into an electrical discharge and then our position would indeed be unenviable.

It was impossible to stand the rocking. I came down and began to skim over the ground. We flew like this for some time then rose to a thousand metres. Over us was a thunderstorm. A July shower with the orange and blue fireworks of lightning is refreshing and pleasant enough on the ground. But it interfered with us. A fighter would have climbed up and flown above the clouds. We had oxygen apparatuses but it was risky climbing with a bomb load.

Panfilov took a radio message from Moscow. We had orders to skirt the thunderstorm and head for the target. We replied: "OK."

"Where are we?" I asked Seryozha.

He mentioned the place.

Ahead of us were more storm clouds. No rain. A few minutes later a river flashed by below us. Seryozha had not been mistaken. I climbed and entered rain clouds again. Once again the rocking began. Lightning. Sparks on the wings and fuselage. Streams of water made the cockpit a regular bathtub.

We were flying straight West irrespective of everything. Our mission had to be carried out.

"Turn to starboard," ordered Seryozha.

I did as he asked. Climbed to the clouds. We were heading northwest. Picked up a radio station. Could hear music. A lilting melody in our headphones. Hans and Gretchen were having a good time. Amusing themselves with music. They suspected nothing yet. Soon our blow would shake the city, and the announcer who had so often announced the annihilation of the Soviet air force would perhaps be the first to make tracks for a bomb shelter.



# ARTILLERY

*Pencil Drawing by Nikolai Zhukov*



THE SCOUT

*Oil painting by V. Karev*



We could catch glimpses of the sky through the clouds. With the help of a sextant Seryozha measured the height of the Polar Star and took bearings.

The ground flashed by beneath. The dark silhouettes of Koenigsberg. Most likely the sound locators had caught us. An air raid warning had evidently been given for the lights went out in the city and the ack-ack set to work.

We began our bombing run over the target. The bomb doors were opened. Seryozha reported: "Bombs gone." The ship trembled all over. The flak was real thick. We'd dropped our whole load. We made our way through the anti-aircraft fire, picked up altitude and circled over the city.

Just then the rest of our aircraft came up. Bomb loads dropped one after the other. The city was wrapped in smoke and flame. The hour of retribution had come for Koenigsberg. Let those vile fraus and frauleins who only yesterday dreamed of receiving packages from the Eastern Front tremble in their lairs. We'll feed them all right. Ahead of us are many nights. All the Nazi cities will get their share. We won't leave anyone out in the cold. We are generous with vengeance. We'll give it to them with interest for Minsk, Smolensk, Odessa, for Kiev and Sevastopol.

I headed the plane back. We were scratched a bit by splinters, but nothing was out of order. The thunderstorm seemed to have stopped. I could hear Seryozha's rollicking voice. He was singing at the top of his lungs. The lightened plane carried us over the clouds smoothly and easily. It was a fine night. A successful night. Soon we would be home and I would throw my arms around Seryozha's shoulders and tell him that in spite of everything he was a brick. Wish every flier had such a navigator! You can fly with him in any weather, to the devil and back.

Just as today he always gets us a run-up straight over the target unerringly. Whether we fly by instrument or by taking astronomical bearings. I know for sure that we'll come in at the target from the best possible direction for beginning our bombing run. His calculations are accurate and besides he has, in my opinion, a certain sixth sense of direction that has never once misled him. Perhaps it can be called intuition. In one way or another, the success of our operations depends a great deal on the navigator. A pilot is the muscles and will of the plane. The navigator is the soul and the eyes.

I put on my headset. I wanted to congratulate Seryozha on the fulfillment of our mission but he was still singing and I joined in.

We crossed the front line. The German anti-aircraft guns were silent. There were no enemy fighters in sight. Over us was a tranquil blue sky and below the lovely, boundless Russian territory. It made my heart ache to think that the enemy was trampling this ground underfoot, looting and destroying. But never mind. Our turn will come. Sooner or later we'll throw them out on their necks, and once again our native fields will blossom. No lousy German is going to live in any "Ostraum." No, he'll never live to do so.

"Who comes to us with the sword shall perish by the sword himself. On this the soil of Russia takes its stand and will always take its stand." Thus said Alexander Nevsky. And this is what we say today as well.

*July 23.* Under the headline: "New Raid on Koenigsberg by Our Aircraft," all the papers are carrying the following report: "On the night of July 20 a group of our aircraft bombed military and industrial targets in the city of Koenigsberg and its environs under difficult weather conditions. As a result of the bombing six fires started in the city and four big explosions occurred."

*July 25.* Third raid on Koenigsberg. The writer Victor Goltsev flew with me in Vassilyev's place. He had been asking permission to take part in a long-range "cruise" behind the German lines for a long time. I tried to talk him out of it but he insisted. Stubborn chap. Still and all I like people who are stubborn and persistent. Had to give way. We got permission from Headquarters and off we went.

This time the weather was good. We flew without any undue exertion along the beaten track.

"How's Goltsev getting along there?" I asked Panfilov.

"He's all right," came the reply. "Says he's not getting much of an impression. He's sorry he didn't come with us on the last trip."

"Tell him not to be in a hurry," said I smiling to myself. "He'll get a taste of what a raid's like when we're over the flak all right. I assure you it'll be lively enough."

And indeed we got a "fine" reception from the anti-aircraft guns. Took successful evasive action and dropped our bombs.

So long Koenigsberg, till we meet again. Lick your wounds. Keep a watch on the sky. Don't complain of your fate. Let us remind you of what Molière said: "You would have it so, you would have it so, George Dandin!" You needn't envy Stettin, Hanover, Dresden, Leipzig, Magdeburg. You needn't envy a single town of the "Third Reich." Their turn will come.

*August 10.* On July 20 the Sovinformbureau reported on the feat of Sergeant Divichenko's crew. The bomber which Divichenko was flying was set on fire by anti-aircraft guns and fighters over an enemy aerodrome. Enveloped in flames, he continued to wipe out the German planes standing on the field, skimming low over them. Then he flew his flaming machine straight into a gasoline tank.

"The fliers who took part in this raid saw huge columns of smoke and flame rise from the burning gasoline tank," said the communique. "Sergeant Divichenko, Navigator Zhuravlyev, radio-gunner Mysikov and air-gunner Yezhov, Stalinist falcons, died the death of the brave. The Soviet people shall ever remember these heroic airmen who fought for their country to the last minute of their lives."

The other day Divichenko, Zhuravlyev and Mysikov returned to their squadrons. Yezhov alone had been killed. Today in the latest issue of our paper, "Red Falcons," I read an interview with Sergeant Divichenko. "Our bomber was crippled right over the aerodrome," relates the Sergeant. "The flames spread rapidly over the entire port wing. The port engine died. The machine was now flying heavily, clumsily. It did not answer to the controls. Mysikov and Yezhov kept up constant machine-gun fire at the grounded enemy aircraft. Several German fighter planes blazed up one

after the other." The aircraft was rapidly losing altitude and the machine-gun clips were empty when a Messerschmitt came at the burning plane.

"If we must die, let's do so with music," thought Divichenko and ordered the radio-gunner Zhuravlyev to continue the operation and to unload the bombs on the enemy aircraft. A stick of bombs burst right in the midst of the German machines.

"Did for fifteen Messers!" shouted Zhuravlyev.

Leaving a thick trail of smoke behind it, the bomber was nearing the ground. The crew realized that only a few seconds of life was left to them but not one of them thought of baling out. They still had bombs on board and Divichenko continued to look for a target. "There's no sense in dying by just crashing into the ground."

Directly ahead of them, right on their course, was a column of German trucks. But the plane was rapidly losing altitude. Divichenko directed it towards the column. At any moment the bombs hanging under the fuselage might explode. In that case they would perish without inflicting any losses on the Germans. It was necessary to make haste.

There they were right over the column. They released the bombs when they were no more than seven to eight metres from the ground. There was a terrific explosion. As to what happened after that Divichenko has only a hazy recollection. Evidently the blast hurled the plane aside. It flew on for a bit and then crashed into a gully between two hills.

Divichenko scrambled out of the wrecked plane. He had injured his face during the crash and blood was streaming from it. His clothing was ablaze. He began to roll on the ground in order to smother the flames. Meanwhile Zhuravlyev and Mysikov extricated themselves from the aircraft. Yezhov was dead in the cabin. The other three crawled off into the woods, where they lay for some time. Getting their bearings by compass, they decided to set off for home. It was a hundred and twenty kilometres to the front. Hungry and utterly exhausted they managed to do the distance, and crawled through to our lines; now they are only too eager to get going once more.

It needs the pen of a Jack London to describe the men of the Bomber Command, to show their courage and will to life.

*August 17.* All last week we bombed enemy troops, railway stations, flying fields and communications.

*August 19.* We flew to Danzig. Nice weather. The moon shed its even, soft blue light over the ground. There was no wind. Visibility was excellent. We came in to our target at an altitude of five thousand metres. We observed fires. That was the work of the men of our squadron who had preceded me today. Well, we backed up our comrades all right. Added fire and pepper with mustard. It's your turn now, Danzig. Receive your share of our hatred.

We were met by flak at the outskirts of the city. Searchlights probed around for us. The blinding beams crossed right on the plane. The explosions all around grew more intense. I picked up speed and came down a bit. The searchlights passed us on from one to the other. I managed to break away from the rays. Panfilov kept reporting where the shells were bursting. I had all I could do taking care of the controls and rudder bars. The aircraft

responded beautifully and the evasive action threw off the anti-aircraft fire. I could see the target and levelled out. I steadied the plane and Seryozha placed the load.

We dived through a gap between the bursting anti-aircraft shells. Then home. And rest.

*August 20.* By Order of the People's Commissar of Defence our squadron has been made a Guards Squadron. In the course of one year we have made 2,500 operational flights. Of these 1,786 were night flights. We dropped approximately 3,000 tons of bombs on military and industrial targets and enemy man power. Our radio-gunners downed 24 enemy fighters in aerial combats. We set fire to or smashed 80 enemy aircraft on flying fields, and damaged many more.

Major Chumachenko's crew made 154 operational flights without incurring any damage to his plane. Captain Simonov made 150 sweeps. Major Krasnukhin, Captain Tyulenev, First Lieutenant Garanin and others are "catching up" with Simonov.

There are two Heroes of the Soviet Union in the squadron and 172 men with Orders.

Stalin has praised the work of the pilots, navigators, gunners, engineers and ground crews of our squadron highly and we're all of us terribly pleased and excited. Everyone is congratulating everyone else.

The Stalin Air Guards. That is a title you really have to earn.

At last the raid on Berlin has been permitted. We have been preparing for it for a long time. For months we dreamed of it. And just as we had begun to give up hopes of ever getting the chance to realize our dream, as we had abandoned our ambition to fly around the world à la Chkalov, we were overjoyed with this unexpected decision. Seryozha walks around as puffed up as a turkey. His face is beaming. We are poring over our maps and going over the route. In a word we are getting ready to take off.

*August 26.* We headed for Berlin with a maximum bomb load. Storm clouds all the way to the front. Then we came across a corridor in the clouds and headed for it. Thunder storms to right and left. Over us a starry sky. Flew this way for about two hours. Then the clouds dispersed. We passed over Stettin. Some of our men had pounded it pretty thoroughly. Fires were raging. Flak. Searchlights scoured the sky.

A fierce headwind rocked the plane. It was difficult flying. Our consumption of fuel increased. We flew in silence. In the course of those moments each of us was thinking his own thoughts. Yet all of us were thinking of one thing: how best to strafe Berlin so that it would long remember our brief visit. In the spring I read a magazine account of a raid by British airmen on Berlin. They had made a good job of it. I envied them. But now we too were "on the job" over the capital of the "Third Reich." We are vying with the British.

"Careful now," said Seryozha. "We're approaching!"

Before us lay Berlin. A huge dark city. It sprawled in the darkness like

an octopus. I seemed to smell its putrid venomous breath, to see its furtive eyes, filled with malice and fear. A hotbed of disease and death, it could not sleep easy. It tossed in the feverish throes of war.

Searchlights reached out for us. I pressed the left rudder bar and took evasive action. Then I flattened out for the run-up. I was so excited I could scarcely breathe. Not that I was worried lest they hit me. It wasn't that. What bothered me was that I might miss, that I might make a botch of it at the last minute. I'd never forgive myself if the bombs landed in the middle of some square or on an empty lot. My first raid on Berlin had to be a smashing blow. The city deserved all that it was going to get. Tomorrow the whole world would know about the raid. Millions of people suffering untold torments at the hands of the Nazi butchers would draw a deep breath of joy. Mothers who had lost their children would bless us as avengers and fighters for a just cause.

Let the bandylegged Goebbels foam at the mouth over the radio in denial of the raid on Germany. Let him try to hoodwink the whole world. Let him try to wriggle out of it. The Berliners would recognize the music of the air bombs we were going to drop on the heart of the city. They would hear it.

The bombs dropped. They hurtled down square on the target. We were caught in the beams of searchlights. Hundreds of searchlights. The other planes had not yet come up. Not a single aircraft on the horizon. I was the only one over the city. The whole system of the Berlin anti-aircraft defence had been let loose on our single plane. The ack-acks were working for all they were worth. The flak was fiercer than anything we had ever yet seen.

For several minutes we could not shake off the beams of the searchlights. We had to get out of their rays somehow. I took violent evasive action, working the controls feverishly. At first the radio-gunners kept reporting the explosions on either side. Then they fell silent. I manœuvred at my own risk.

"Hello there!" I shouted. "Have you gone to sleep or something?"

Alexander Panfilov's voice came over the intercom:

"Comrade Commander, there are hundreds of explosions on all sides. Above and below. It's useless carrying on observation. You'll have to manœuvre as best you can."

We flew in the rays of searchlights for many kilometres with flak coming up at us. At last we broke through. All clear.

We navigated by visual bearings. The radio-gunners were singing. Seryozha joined in. My legs felt as if they were weighted with lead. I was dead tired. My eyes were pasting. I took a sniff of ammonia. At last we crossed to our own lines. We came down on an aerodrome to refuel. Just as I was climbing out of the cockpit I saw a number of fighters taking off. Guessing what was up I ordered the crew back to their places. I climbed steeply. German bombers were over the aerodrome and our anti-aircraft defences were showering them with fire.

The Germans were driven off and we came down again.

"You were born under a lucky star," one of the ground mechanics said to me pointing to a yawning crater. "The bomb was already whistling downwards when you took off. Taking off with such speed is what saved you. Smart work, boys!"

I'm satisfied with the results of the sortie. Still it did not pass off without mistakes. I made the run-up over the target at a tangent to instead of with the wind. This reduced our speed, and our plane skimmed slowly over a well-defended target. After releasing our bombs I made a semi-half-turn. This kept me under ack-ack fire for an extra two or three minutes. I shall take these mistakes into account. I won't repeat them.

*August 29.* Our fourth raid on Koenigsberg. Excellent weather. Mission carried out successfully.

*August 30.* Sergei's wife, Lydia Nikolayevna, his mother, Nadezhda Borisovna, and his five-year-old son, Yura, have perished in the South at the hands of the Hitlerites. A neighbour informed him of this by letter. Sergei sat at the table with his chin in his hand. His face was petrified, his brows drawn together in a straight line over his nose. He did not cry. But I know that hopeless grief when it's impossible to shed a tear.

"Tough, Seryozha," I said and stroked his head as if he were a child. "Buck up, lad. There's nothing to be done about it. They shared the fate of many Russian women, children and old people. A horrible fate. We shall take revenge for everything. . . ."

In a hoarse voice utterly unlike his own, Sergei muttered:

"Those are not people. No, they are not people. They're poisonous, slithering snakes. For them there is nothing that is sacred."

He got up and went out for a bit. Then he came back and sat down on the sofa silently. He looked grim and strange. He smoked cigarette after cigarette, sighing constantly. I felt that I had to distract him from his gloomy thoughts and mood somehow, but I didn't know how to do it. I invited him to come to the Red Army Clubhouse with me. There's a big concert on today with Moscow performers.

"Leave me alone," he snapped. "You're about as tactful as an elephant. My family's been wiped out. Do you understand, my family! The son who was the pride of my heart has been murdered. That's what. And you want me to go and listen to the wisecracks of some master of ceremonies, do you? Thanks."

"Well, if that's the case let's sit down and shed tears together. Will that make things any easier?"

"I didn't ask you to do any such thing."

"Well then, what do you want?"

"To go bombing. To take off this minute. Go and ask for permission."

"The weather's not flyable," said I softly, realizing that my argument was feeble.

"Is that so!" he exclaimed. "And it's Captain Molodchy who dares to say this. I wasn't hearing things, was I? The weather is not unflyable. There's no such thing. I flew with you in fogs, in rain and in snow. It was possible then. And today it isn't possible, eh?"

"It's possible to fly, Seryozha, but it's hard to aim the bombs. We've no right to waste ammunition. The C.O. won't permit it and therefore it's impossible."

"All the same, go and ask," he insisted. "Tell them that I just can't

stand it. The enemy is drowning our land in blood. We've got to go up, Sasha!"

"It's impossible to fly with you today," said I. "You're too wrought up. You're not yourself. Chekhov once said: 'When you sit down to write a story, you must be as cold as ice.' That holds for us airmen too. Understand? Your brain's aflame. You might make a mistake. And a flier makes a mistake over hostile territory only once in his life. The country still needs both of us. I don't want to fly with you today, and can't do so, Major Kulikov. Have I made myself clear? Well, that will be about all."

He stared at me with a bewildered look and crushed the unsmoked cigarette in his hand. Then he sighed again.

"But will we go up tomorrow, Sasha?"

"We will," I replied. "If you calm down we'll fly."

*September 1.* We received information about a recent raid made by our unit on a German aerodrome where lots of German aircraft were grounded. The results of the bombing were: 12 aircraft destroyed, 36 damaged, 40 trucks set on fire, a fuel tank and 5 supply warehouses blown up, 156 officers and men killed.

Not so bad, seems to me.

*September 2.* I keep getting letters from people I don't know. These letters come from women, old folks, young Pioneers and men and officers. They are congratulations on the bombing of German cities.

"Our hearts fill with joy whenever we read in the papers that a big group of Soviet aircraft has bombed another German lair," writes Maria K. "Congratulations, dear comrades. I have two sons at the front. They're doing their bit, and I'm proud of them. I'm proud of you too, our splendid airmen. Take revenge for the pain and suffering of our country. Do not spare your bombs. Let the enemy tremble at our raids. Regards to you, who are as dear to me as my own boys."

*September 4.* Flew to Budapest.

"We're off to visit the Hungarians," said Seryozha. "It's interesting to know how they'll meet us and what they'll treat us to."

"Don't count on being treated to anything good," said I. "They're poor people, vassals. They themselves feed on crumbs from another man's table."

The weather was not so good. Storm clouds. We kept passing holes in the clouds and took our bearings by landmarks. Passed Czechoslovakia, then Hungary. The cities were all lit up just as in peacetime. On the Danube we could see the lights of lifebuoys. The steamers were all lit up.

As we approached Budapest we could see fires. The city had just been bombed by aircraft that had taken off before me. And still lots of houses weren't even blacked out. Automobiles were driving down the streets with their headlights on and the street lamps were lit.

Made a run-up over the target. Desultory flak. No more than two or three AA guns fired. After what we'd experienced in Koenigsberg and Berlin this was child's play. Frankly speaking we never expected such a reception. Never mind, poverty is no sin.

We jettisoned our bombs calculatingly and calmly, then veered off to

the East. A squadron of our planes passed. Looking round, I could see spurts of red flame. Those were the Soviet H.E.'s bursting. Hitler's satellites got their share. Until now they lived tranquilly enough. They thought that they were far and no one could reach them. This impunity gave rise to brazenness and swaggering. They boasted of their strength. Brandished their arms. Today they rubbed their eyes and came to. Our bombs will make them a little smaller.

We headed for home through storm clouds. The way back was much harder. Sergei and I had our hands full. I had to keep sniffing at the smelling salts. Ate some chocolate. The crew kept roaring away, singing songs all the time to keep me from falling asleep. Came down on our own aerodrome. We were ten hours and one minute in the air.

*September 5.* "Sasha, the Major General's been killed," exclaimed Seryozha as he opened the door.

I jumped up, unable to utter a sound. A terrible pain shot through my heart. Perhaps it was only a rumour? It couldn't be. At last I began to question Sergei. He told me the details. There could be no doubt.

And so my teacher and godfather is gone. I sank into a chair and sat there unable to stir. Nikolai Ivanovich. What a man he was. Ten years in the air force. Trained hundreds of fliers, famed throughout the Soviet Air Force.

Fought with the Finns. In the Finnish campaign his squadron made a hundred operational flights. One hundred and thirty men in his squadron received Government decorations. And now? In the Patriotic War? Who of us did not feel his guiding hand?

He was exacting and strict. We young students of his sometimes grumbled. Spoke about carping. But we were soon convinced that he was right. He wanted to make experts of us, fighting men of a high calibre. He had the soul of an eagle. He could not stand mediocrity in anything. He despised and hated lazy people, idlers and cowards. If the man wouldn't change his ways and come up to scratch, the General wouldn't have him in his unit but sent him packing. He recognized only excellent work. Led us from victory to victory. We loved him. Our love bordered on adoration. An affectionate word from him inspired us. A reproach would make us think hard and suffer too. I remember a talk he gave us once. Our army had withdrawn from a big city. We were feeling pretty low. Someone sighed:

"How long will we be retreating?"

"Don't whine, lads," said Nikolai Ivanovich sternly. "There are all sorts of retreats. By retreating we are inflicting mortal wounds on the enemy. We are smashing his materiel. Bear in mind what Suvorov used to say about leading the enemy on. A time will come when we'll say, halt. Then we'll say, forward, to Berlin. The Russians know how to retreat and know how to attack."

He spoke for a long time about the art of manœuvring in the Russian army, and his sincere words, uttered with the forceful conviction of their truth, bucked us up no end.

His coffin is now in the Red Army Clubhouse. We went there. There was a solemn silence in the hall. Heaps of flowers. Wreaths from friends and fellow servicemen. At the four corners of the coffin was an honour guard of



Guardsmen, his pupils. I looked at his stern face. Tears choked me. What a loss. It seemed to me that he must get up, raise his head and we would hear the familiar voice:

"And so, boys, forward, to Berlin!"

*September 12.* Today we received the Guards banner. Our men lined up on the big aerodrome. A member of the War Council congratulated the personnel on receiving the lofty and honoured title of Guardsmen. The banner was handed to the Wing Commander. Together with the Commissar he accepted the banner and kissed it.

Then the men knelt on one knee. The words of our pledge rang out in the silence: "We pledge to the Soviet Government, the Bolshevik Party and the people's leader, the great Stalin, that we will strike still harder deep in the hinterland of the enemy, that every one of our bombing sorties will be fatal, sowing fear and confusion amidst the enemy."

*September 25.* We're operating on another sector of the front. Hitting out at enemy man power. There are lots of German fighter planes. We bombed from low altitudes, like assault planes. Sorties twice a night. Bad weather. Thunder storms. Rain. We fly by chart, in spite of all difficulties and complications of the weather conditions. The fliers here are doing splendid work on "U-2's." They take off on their slow machines with loads of small bombs and pepper the Germans tirelessly. They bomb houses and pill-boxes, not whole blocks, in towns occupied by the German units. Their low speed enables them to place their bombs with an accuracy that we can't even dream of. They can come down wherever they choose. They don't even need an aerodrome, in the sense that we understand it. On dark nights these gallant men on the "U-2's" fly over the German trenches so low that their fuselage almost brushes the ground. And they keep bombing away.

We also do some bombing and use our machine guns on columns of infantry on the roads. We pursue trucks. The Germans jump out of them and scurry through the steppes like rabbits.

The infantry is accompanied by anti-aircraft artillery. Cannon, machine guns, rifles and tommy guns open fire at us. As a rule the fire is unaimed. Much ado about nothing. Our artillery men fire much more accurately and to the mark.

"Sasha," Sergei said to me, "if we were to count up how many shells the Germans have sent flying at our kite in the course of the whole war we'd get a pretty respectable figure. It would come to dozens of tons of metal and powder."

"The demented Führer doesn't care a hang what the bill comes to," said I. "He spares neither money nor men. A desperate gambler, that's what he is."

"But look here, the Germans will have to get down to the bookkeeping of war some time. They will be called on to pay retributions for the losses they inflicted. They'll have to pay for everything. We'll force them to rebuild the Dnieper dam, the mines of the Donbas and Krivoi Rog. They'll build a new Smolensk."

"First we have to smash them, get them down on their knees, Seryozha."

*October 10.* We're hard at work. Rotten weather. Frequent rains and fog.

*October 13.* We'd been given orders to bomb an important railway bridge. Our fliers had been after it for many nights, but it was still standing. Trains were running over it. There was a very strong AA defence at the bridge. Messers kept up a constant barrage over it day and night. We'd spent a lot of energy and means on this target but had not had any success.

I asked permission to bomb the bridge at dawn. Permission was not granted. Reasons: might be shot down by flak or fighters on the way back. At last permission was granted, but with the condition that if the weather cleared up by dawn and there would be no clouds I would return.

Taxied out for the take-off. Low ceiling. Rain. Poor visibility. Difficult to take off. Broke away from the squelchy aerodrome by sheer force. Flew in clouds as far as the front. In the vicinity of the target it was clear. Clear sky. Dawn was breaking. All the same I decided to place my bombs. Approached at an altitude of three thousand metres. It was necessary to come down and skim low over the bridge as we dropped delayed action bombs.

Dived to ten or fifteen metres. Began our run-up to the target. The ack-acks were silent. Seryozha released the bombs. The ack-acks opened up desultory fire. Suddenly the outline of a water tower rose before me. Engrossed in manoeuvring over the target we had overlooked this enemy that threatens fliers at low heights. I pulled the controls abruptly. The nose of the plane rose. I just managed to clear the roof. The least bit later and we would have crashed.

We climbed up out of range of the flak. At a height of three thousand metres, Seryozha said:

"Come on, Sasha, let's take a deep breath together. Maybe it's true that we were born under a lucky star. When that tower loomed up in front of us I thought to myself: that's the end, no more flying."

*November 6.* Tomorrow is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. If not for the war what celebrating there would be throughout the country! Never mind, we'll fight to victory and celebrate after the war.

Seryozha has summed up the work of the crew. We have 160 operational flights to our credit. We've done 180,000 kilometres over enemy territory and dropped more than 200 tons of bombs on various targets. We took a hand in defending Moscow, saw action on the Kharkov and Voronezh Fronts and around Leningrad and Stalingrad. We've flown to Germany and to Hitler's vassal countries. I must say that the "itinerary" of our crew looks quite impressive.

"We've done what we could," said Sergei. "Wish to God that everyone could do the same. And I hope that before the end of the war we'll still manage to add something or other to our score. Right, Sasha?"

"Right," said I. "If only we're alive we certainly will."

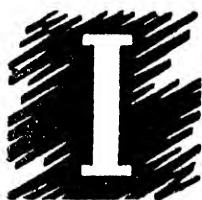


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ALEXANDER POLYAKOV

## AT RZHEV



### BREAKTHROUGH

If the Germans had known that Major Zhigarev and his scouts were crawling right in front of their fortifications for the fourth day already, they would not have hesitated a second before unleashing against him the fire of all their two hundred guns set up in this district with their muzzles turned towards the East. But the Germans did not know that the Soviet artillery reconnaissance was preparing a powerful offensive on the fortified area covering the road to Rzhev.

Major Zhigarev was a broad-shouldered, stocky, thirty-five year-old artillery officer, with a frank, energetic Russian face, a straight nose and calm grey eyes. He was in command of a heavy artillery regiment, and right now of this group as well.

It was dusk. After four days of incessant artillery reconnaissance, the party of five men headed by the Major reached a glade overgrown with weeds.

"Well, my friends, let's have a rest. . . . Zaitsev, Belikh!" called the Major to his scouts. "Have you got what we've been seeing these days firmly fixed in your heads?"

"We have, Comrade Major," replied Zaitsev.

"We'll live and see, fire and check," said Zhigarev.

Darkness had descended over the field when the artillery scouts returned to their own lines.

Major Zhigarev's observation point was located in a high fir tree. Eight rungs up a little ladder and sixteen branches. Here was a platform which was lovingly embraced on all sides by the very same fir branches. It made quite a cosy nest. In the nest sat the commander himself. Around it were his scouts.

The Major took his eyes away from the stereoscope.

"Zaitsev! Give me the map!" And in a second a map case with the disposition of his batteries appeared before the Major.

"The plan of the targets!" And there was the map case with a draft pasted on it. On it in blue and red pencil were miniature villages, bridges and stations. Above the drawing was a spider's web of dots and dashes—German blockhouses, batteries and command posts.

The Major pulled a drawing case out of his pocket and took out a compass. Then he reached for an aluminium trigonometry ruler. His hands flitted over the plan rapidly.

. . . 04:45 hours—fifteen minutes before the beginning of the artillery barrage. It is easy to imagine what was going on at the batteries now: the gun layers had already translated the crosses on the panorama into fixed aim. The No. 2's were sitting on their haunches at the gun carriages, stroking the copper belts of the steel "cucumbers."

04:55 hours—five minutes before the barrage. The batteries had already received all orders but the last—"Fire!" This command would be given simultaneously for all guns from Major Zhigarev's OP for a joint artillery salvo.

What were Major Zhigarev and his crews at their guns thinking of in these last five minutes of strained tension?

The gunners were most likely hoping that none of the fir branches camouflaging their guns would tumble down on the barrels of their guns at the last moment and throw it out of alignment. It is difficult of course to imagine that a frail fir branch which five minutes later will itself shudder and quake in a fever at the first shot can even stir the huge barrel of a cannon. But that's what a line of sight is like. The men are always on pins and needles about it. Young artillery men who have just come to the battery are frequently taken in by the joke of the "veterans": "Go chase that crow away from the line of sight." And even though there is no crow sitting there still fear for the "line" had remained to this day. A joke's a joke, but if the gun did happen to stir so much as a millimetre the shell would be way off the target.

It is hard to say what the Major himself was thinking of during these last minutes before the "big noise." He was sitting there calmly enough and gazing fixedly in the direction of the enemy. Was he flying in thought over the twenty-kilometre projectory of his guns to the enemy bridges and blockhouses, which in a few minutes would fly into the air, or were his thoughts streaking over the thousand-kilometre projectory from Rzhev to distant Krasnoyarsk, where his three-year-old daughter was waiting for him? . . .

The Major rose to his feet. Swinging his left arm he hitched up the sleeve of his khaki trenchcoat and glanced at his watch. One minute remained to the beginning of the barrage.

"Ready! Aim!"

Five sharp. The previously arranged volley of several mortar batteries flashed. The sound of the firing had not yet reached the Major when his command rang out:

"Fire!"

A hurricane of fire lit up the terrain. The earth trembled with the thunder of the first volley. It seemed as if the din rose to the very skies, shaking the stars.

"Zaitsev, what are your observations?" asked the Major without turning away from the stereoscope.

"Orient 3. Right 0-10. New blockhouse."

"Yudenko, how're your targets?" asked the Major of the battery commander.

"Batteries No. 1 and No. 3 have demolished their targets!"

"Excellent! In that case take another blockhouse."

"Comrade Major," reported Zaitsev, "six tanks are leaving the village of Byelkovo."

"Yudenko, why are you letting the tanks get past? Overtake them!"

Yudenko gave orders for one battery to wipe out the blockhouse and another to straddle the tanks on the road.

The concentrated artillery offensive was so unexpected for the Germans that it roused panic throughout their fortified area. The Germans could be seen plainly through the stereoscopic finder scrambling out of their dug-outs. The whole horizon was covered with the erupting volcanoes of explosions.

The enemy attempted to return fire, but such a squall descended on their batteries that they fell silent in utter confusion. A rocket gave the signal for the attack by the infantry and tanks. While the infantry engaged the Tommy-gunners who had remained alive at the advance position, the tanks pushed into the depths of the enemy defences.

Meanwhile things were stirring in Major Zhigarev's OP as well. The artillery barrage had to be carried over so that it would be ahead of the advancing infantry constantly. At the same time it had to keep up with the fleeing Germans, cutting off their retreat, and it had to prevent the enemy from bringing up reserves.

"What are your observations, Zaitsev?" the Major asked for the nth time.

"The village of Dyshovka has been occupied by our infantry. They are pushing ahead."

"I see that myself. What else?"

"The observation point on the hill with the tower has been demolished."

"I see that too. What else?"

"The railway track has been blown up near the booth."

"Of course! That's at my orders! Why do you keep reporting things that I'm simply fed up with looking at myself?" shouted the Major irritably.

"Comrade Major," reported the scout again, "a German armoured train has appeared from the West."

"An armoured train? That's fine. Show me."

Still without removing his eyes from the stereoscope, the Major was already calling down from his tree:

"Yudenko!"

"Here, Comrade Major!"

"Can't you see what's coming at you?"

"I opened fire, Comrade Major."

"At what?"

"At the armoured train!"

Once again the Major called down to the scout, who had now fallen silent:

"Zaitsev, have you fallen asleep? What else is there?"

"About two hundred Germans coming down the road towards our post."

"What's that?" exclaimed the Major peering through the stereoscope eagerly. "Why didn't you say so before?"

"Under escort, Comrade Major, they're prisoners," mumbled the embarrassed Zaitsev.

. . . The units of long-range guns pounded their targets with the help of an air observer, who corrected their aim from his aircraft. Here are some excerpts from his radio messages:

"Target No. 17, North 4, East 2. . . . North 1. . . . Correct. Running fire. Crossing destroyed, don't give them a chance to repair it."

". . . Target No. 4 bridge. Continue fire. West 1. Correct. Continue fire. Send a concrete buster. Correct. Continue with demolition. Good. Nicely cooked. I'm passing to Target No. 1."

Target No. 1 was an aerodrome. Major Cherkassov, assistant regimental commander, was covering it. At the first volley he set fire to two enemy aircraft, as was reported by our air observer. The middle of the landing field was converted into such a crater that the first German plane to return hesitated to land on it. But the plane was evidently out of fuel and had to come down on the field alongside. Through the air only three words came from the air observer: the coordinates and "aircraft." Cherkassov quickly shifted his fire from the old aerodrome to the "new," and the crew had scarcely managed to get out of their plane before the third shell landed square on the mark and blew the aircraft to smithereens.

. . . Guns thundered. The fortified area of the German front had been breached. Under cover of the artillery, our infantry had moved ahead fifteen kilometres.

On leaving the command post, Major Zhigarev said to Zaitsev with a smile in his eyes:

"It really wasn't such a bad job of reconnoitring. If you keep at it hard enough, you'll make a gunner yet!"

## THE END OF "BERTHA"

Our scouts had been taking an interest in this gay spot for a long time. They had made their way through the German lines for many kilometres to a former rest home that was now a house of prostitution for fascist officers. Officers who had received short furloughs came to this front line bawdy house in a picturesque nook not far from Lake Seliger. The personnel of the house too was changed from time to time—a couple of hundred prostitutes brought here from Germany itself and other European countries. Getting out of the front line positions for a few days, the officers indulged in the wildest orgies here. They were endless. Drunken voices and the tramping of feet could be heard far and wide around this spot. Frequently brawls broke out.

Of late artillery scout Zaitsev, who knew a little German, and who made frequent "visits" to the holiday-making officers, had noticed something special in the conversations that he overheard.

"Listening to the Fritzes," related Zaitsev, "all you hear them talk about is a certain Bertha. At first I thought it was the name of some girl. But after a while I could see that there were altogether too many 'Berthas' here. I didn't know what to think: either all the German women here are called Bertha or else there's a certain Bertha that serves all of them."

Whenever he reported to regimental commander Major Zhigarev on the results of his reconnaissance, Zaitsev invariably said:

"Again, Comrade Major, this Bertha. . . ."

When the Major smiled thoughtfully, he added, plucking up courage:

"Maybe it's some German dame who's famous in their profession."

But the Major usually kept quiet. He livened up only when Zaitsev brought back some officer's papers from his latest "trip."

The Major sent for Captain Nikolayev, commander of the reconnaissance squad.

"A lot of artillery officers have appeared in the rest home and around it. This has been established by documents. There are some new units here. Visual and sound reconnaissance must be concentrated on this area and reports brought to me three times a day."

The matter took a serious turn. According to all indications, the Germans were preparing an offensive on this sector of the front. But they were not hurrying, having drawn up so far only heavy long-range guns.

"We'll forestall them. See to it that your men put their noses to the grindstone," said the Major to Captain Nikolayev in parting. "As for the rest home we ought to send an airborne suitor to those Berthas," he added jokingly, turning to the Commissar.

"There's something to that," agreed the Commissar. "We should have done that long ago."

"I didn't want to scare them off, in the first place, and secondly they're still out of range."

The Major called up pilot Vassilyev on the telephone. Vassilyev was acting commander of the observation company in those days.

Shortly after, Vassilyev was sitting in the regimental commander's dugout together with his navigator and air observer.

"Beginning with tomorrow," requested Zhigarev, "circle closer around the lake area and take photographs. Try to find out when they rest, when they go walking and where they go walking. . . . We'll get data ready for an artillery bombardment and try visiting them. Clear?"

"Absolutely," declared Vassilyev.

After this conversation the Major began to receive all the data that interested him concerning the target from Nikolayev of the reconnaissance squad and Vassilyev of the air observation company. In his turn, he kept moving two batteries of long-range guns closer and closer to the German line in the course of the next few nights. This was accomplished successfully. The batteries took up permanent fire positions and reserve positions. Not a single German observer spotted this preparatory work.

The morning dawned clear, with a scarcely noticeable mist. By ten o'clock the sun was already beginning to bake down. Zhigarev's forward artillery observers were under cover in some sparse shrubbery. They were gazing intently through stereoscopic finders.

It was Sunday and unusual animation was observed in the vicinity of the house of prostitution. Germans were streaming from all directions to the meadow bordering on the woods. The scouts had no difficulty in making out the women's flowered silk kimonos and bright summer dresses. Over two hundred people gathered. A brass band settled down at the edge of the woods and an officers' ball began in the great outdoors.

Major Zhigarev kept receiving brief radiograms at his command post. The last one stated:

"The number of Germans is increasing! The band is playing."

"We're the only ones who are missing!" exclaimed Zhigarev. "Let's cover that fascist rabble, the officers and their Berthas, right now with our own band."

The command was given to the batteries to get ready to fire at the zone which they already knew. And at the very moment when dancing began, Zhigarev gave the command to open up a running fire at the Nazis.

The first terrifying volley of the long-range guns boomed. After that the rumbling roar kept up for five minutes. One hundred and fifty heavy shells landed on the comparatively small area. And when all was quiet again, the site of the officers' picnic was black and shrouded in smoke. Many had been wiped out there. Aerial photographs taken that same day testified to this.

A terrible panic set in among the Germans, naturally. Several minutes passed after our volley before they opened sparse fire from their light artillery, which caused no damage at all to our positions.

"Well, we've finished with the Berthas," remarked Zaitsev.

But in actual fact this was only the beginning.

The enemy artillery fire kept mounting in intensity. On the third night the dugout of the command post was suddenly shaken by an unusually heavy blast. It was like an air bomb. The men ran out to take a look, but no aircraft were audible. Small shells continued bursting all around, but from time to time the heavy blast was repeated.

"Aha! So you've started to talk, my sweetheart," muttered Major Zhigarev. "Well, chatter away, chatter away, have your last say before you die, Frau Bertha."

Calling Captain Nikolayev over the telephone, he asked:

"Did you hear anything? What's the matter with your sound ranging?"

"We're deciphering the ribbon. So far we know where the shells burst and the direction from which they're coming. We haven't intersected the sound of the shot yet."

Soon it was reported to the Major that a big gun was firing away methodically from the depths of the German defences. Judging by the splinters, its calibre was over three hundred millimetres and its range anywhere from thirty to forty kilometres.





CAVALRY CHARGE

*Oil painting by Pyotr Krivonozov (Grekov Studios)*



GUARDS CAVALRYMEN ON THE FIELD OF BORODINO

*Oil Painting by S. Aladzhalov*

The German heavy gun kept up its fire all night. And all night Zhigarev cursed the scouts: Why didn't they know exactly where that gun was emplaced? For three days Zhigarev looked for it with all the means at his disposal. For this purpose he sent out the whole observation squad. Pilot Vassilyev, whom he had always liked in general for his splendid work, got it hot from him while he was still in the air, and later the Major added over the telephone:

"What's the good of you anyway? What did you do for me?"

"Well, we did help with the rest home, with those Berthas," put in Vassilyev timidly in justification.

"What the hell do I want with your Berthas! Was it only to them that I sent you? Have you forgotten about the artillery officers? Don't you remember what I told you?"

"That's right, you did tell me, but I couldn't look them over very well, could I!"

"As a matter of fact you didn't even give the Berthas the once over. You let the main Bertha go."

"Which one was that, Comrade Major?"

"Why, the one that's serenading us now every night with half a hundred shells. The German heavy gun."

After a short pause, Zhigarev added more calmly, but curtly:

"See to it that you find Bertha by tomorrow!"

All day long the observers searched the area assumed to be the location of the gun. Several times they were in danger of being shot down by German fighters or flak, but they did not stop their search. At last, together with the sound locator scouts, pilot Vassilyev succeeded in locating the damned "Bertha" just before evening. Highly elated, he radioed his information to the Major immediately.

"Check up on it better," ordered the Major.

A few minutes later the observer reported once again:

"Everything's been checked up and calculated. It's 'Bertha' all right! I'm transmitting the coordinates."

The Major hurried to get his fire ready. Busy as he was, he never stopped repeating:

"Now that's what I call a regular fellow! I've always appreciated the way he catches on to things."

The whole regiment opened fire on the distant "Bertha," which was at the limit of its range. Fliers corrected the concentrated artillery fire. At last Vassilyev gave the final order from the air:

"Cease fire!"

The gun and its crew had been destroyed. The result was established by a photograph. The heavy gun that had been brought to the district of Rzhev on fifteen railway platforms and set up on a special reinforced concrete emplacement, to which a narrow gauge line had been laid, ceased to exist. . . .

Frau "Bertha" was dead.

## ON THE ARTILLERY OBSERVATION PLANE

And so Frau Bertha was no more. Her demise was the triumph of the observer pilot Vassilyev. He had done a good job of "paying his addresses" to this steel "lady."

From that time on, Major Zhigarev, who was usually very sparing of praise, used to say in a gratified tone about Vassilyev:

"Some suitor, eh? Simply killing!"

I saw this "suitor" in the midst of a group of airmen and artillery observers on a high latticed balcony of a house on a state farm. They were having a rare hour of rest, rare, that is, for men at the front. A guitar was moaning low in the hands of a blond airman. To the accompaniment of the strings he was singing with feigned melancholy an original parody of a love song:

"Alas, my dear friends, believe me I beg you,

I cannot forget her, the Bertha I slew. . . ."

It was hard to believe that this frail and modest airman with the unruly lock of hair tumbling over his forehead was the Vassilyev who was the terror of all the German artillery men on our sector of the front, that it was he who flew over the enemy fire positions on his observation plane, searching for new targets and directing our long-range fire against them. This "killing suitor" would purposely fly into the most dangerous aerial zone and attract the fire of the enemy flak in order to photograph it.

The airmen and artillery correctors under Major Zhigarev were bold, brave lads. They used to say, "Better not to come home at all if we're not going to carry out our mission." That was a strict law within the observation detachment.

. . . That day Kudrashev, commander of this detachment, had received orders from Zhigarev to photograph one of the sectors of the enemy defences where several mortar and artillery batteries had been emplaced.

Vassilyev had been assigned to carry out this mission. Lieutenant Tessa went along as the artillery corrector. I served as navigator.

Senior Mechanic Kurganov, Mechanic Pulyayev and Engineman Olkha had already checked up on the aircraft.

"The machine's ready!" Kurganov reported to Vassilyev.

We put on our parachutes, headphones and intercom discs—the gadgets for interplane communication during flight.

Pilot Vassilyev was completely transformed. The recent guitar player with the unbuckled army belt and the unruly hair was now standing smartly and strictly to attention in a blue coverall and flying helmet that completely covered his shock of hair.

He ordered Tessa and me to take our places in the aircraft.

Once inside, I immediately noticed fresh scratches and holes in the instrument panel.

"Was that long ago?" I asked Tessa.

"Ten days ago. Navigator Tulpanov was killed here at this place."

I knew about this incident. That day had been one both of joy and sorrow for the detachment, joy because our forces had forced the Volga. And it

had been Major Zhigarev, with the help of the observation plane, who had covered the crossing at that time. Four German ground batteries and one anti-aircraft battery had been completely destroyed then.

But the plane had been attacked by two Messerschmitts. The observer aircraft had returned furious fire and taken violent evasive action, but in spite of it an enemy cannon shell had landed in the navigator's cabin. The following laconic radio message had been received at Zhigarev's observation point:

"Mission accomplished. Casualty among the crew—Navigator Tulpanov killed. Returning to base. Vassilyev."

... The aircraft taxied over the big flower-dotted meadow as over a carpet and in a few seconds we were already sailing in the boundless sea of the sky.

I had to become thoroughly acquainted with my cabin. Navigators' machine guns?! I had already managed to learn how to handle them on the aerodrome. Machine guns come first. It was over these guns that Navigator Tulpanov had slumped. From them he had peppered the enemy for the last time while the corrector was directing tons of shells on the enemy positions. It was at this post that the gallant artillery airman had perished.

The whole cabin could easily be described by the one word "laboratory." There were all sorts of gadgets and instruments in it.

We could see toy villages, little squares of fields and the fine threads of roads flashing by below us. Away on the left a silvery ribbon gleamed. It began somewhere under our wing and ended far off on the horizon, just where the sun had risen not so long ago. That was the Volga. It was an excellent and distinct landmark amidst the forests, fields, and swamps, which merged in a single green expanse.

I was taking a course for the upper reaches of the Volga. Rzhev was there. It was only a few minutes' flying time to this city. We could already see its suburbs, the vast field of the aerodrome that had been occupied by our forces, the smoking military training camp in which the fiercest of battles was raging. People who had fled from Rzhev had informed me that German barons had occupied the splendid villas in the neighbourhood of the airport. There they were, blazing away particularly vividly right now. The city itself was shrouded in a thick veil of filthy smoke.

Vassilyev swept straight towards the target. It was on the outskirts of the town. Expecting anti-aircraft fire, he took evasive action. So far all was well. Everything was quiet in the sky. Corrector Tessa was occupied with his intricate work. Zhigarev would undoubtedly be satisfied with the photographs.

Tessa kept in constant touch with the ground, with Zhigarev's radio operator, Shulga, an expert at his work.

"Falcon, falcon speaking," shouted Tessa. "Volga, take the coordinates."

The steel falcon was sending the coordinates of the target to the artillery men on the Volga. Their call signals were particularly clear that day.

Tessa kept sending new data constantly. Zhigarev responded to them with fire.

"North 4, East 1," the corrector informed the Volga as he observed the explosions.

"North 1."

"South 1."

"Correct. Running fire!"

The explosions on the ground became more frequent. The aircraft circled the target twice, and a new radio signal flew to the Volga:

"Cease fire! The enemy battery has been destroyed!"

"For Tulpanov!" came Tessa's wrathful voice on the intercom. "Let those swine remember! . . ."

Its mission accomplished, the aircraft took a course for home. Vassilyev had the habit of skimming low over some of Zhigarev's batteries on his way back to base. Diving from a high altitude over the area of the fire positions he skimmed past the batteries, smiling happily and almost able to shake the hundreds of hands that were lifted up to him in thanks.

The "killing suitor" had returned to the ground. He had paid court successfully from the air to several "Berthas" today, perhaps not as big as the recent one had been. Half an hour later from the latticed balcony of the little cottage his voice was again sighing:

"Alas, my dear friends, believe me I beg you,  
I cannot forget her, the Bertha I slew. . . ."

## THE STORY OF A GUN

"Look here, pals, when the war is over I want you to make me a present of this gun. I'll take it with me to the Caucasus, bring it to my school, eh? . . ."

Shalva Bibilashvili was speaking, gun officer and former teacher in a Georgian school. He was of medium height with a well-knit athletic figure. His was a typical Southern face with a bronze complexion that he had managed to preserve successfully even amidst the swamps of the Kalinin Region. Right now his face was smiling and there were preoccupied lines across his forehead. He was sitting on a mound amidst the swamp, drenched with the rain, and gazing affectionately at his gun while he told his fellow gunners:

"Too bad, I don't suppose they will give it to me. . . . What a wonderful classroom exhibit it would be for lessons on the history of the war. . . ."

And indeed, this very gun—No. 1 of Battery 4 in Zhigarev's regiment—would have a place of honour reserved for it after the war not only in Bibilashvili's classroom but at any big all-Union exhibition of arms.

This gun fired more accurately and intensively than any of the others in the regiment, and did so thanks to the seething energy and skill of its crew. Bibilashvili was keeping a diary of the life history of his gun in a little blue book, punctiliously recording the road it had traversed, the number of rounds it had fired and the victories it had sustained.

The gun had first fallen into the hands of the crew last year. From that time on Bibilashvili had been its officer. The gun had left for the front during

the very first days of the war and in July had fired at the Germans around Smolensk. Since then it had managed to be in encirclement, to break through safely, after which it had taken part in the routing of the Germans at Moscow, in the freeing of the city of Kalinin, and now it was pounding the enemy here, in the fighting at Rzhev.

In command of the battery was a twenty-five-year-old captain from the Ukraine, Dubina by name. His whole soul was wrapped up in his No. 1 gun and its officer, Shalva Bibilashvili.

"That's what you call a gun—one of the seven wonders! And do you know what's most important about it? The head of its officer! . . ."

I used to meet Dubina every day at the observation point.

"At the enemy dugout!" the young captain would call out loudly and distinctly.

And the order which the man at the telephone had just received straight from the mouth of the commander would be transmitted to the fire position that very second in exactly the same intonation.

"Ready!" continued Dubina.

"Ready!" repeated the telephonist almost simultaneously.

And thus the order would continue to be transmitted until the final "Fire!"

"Gun fired!" relayed the orderly from the fire position.

As a matter of fact the commander never waited for this report as the sound came over the air in a few seconds—the battery was four kilometres behind our position. But his every nerve, his ears and eyes were now strained and concentrated on the target. He had to gauge how much the shell had deviated from the target. So far there was still a column of smoke in front of his eyes and he had to determine whether the shell had overshot the target or fallen short. The explosion had obscured the target, which meant that the shell had fallen short. The range had to be lengthened, the barrel of the gun raised the least bit.

. . . It was raining. Dubina continued sending out orders and directions from his observation point, raising his voice the least bit from time to time either at a scout or the topographer or the runners, which meant that someone was not working fast enough. From his platform high up in a tree, Dubina controlled the fire of the heavy batteries.

The strict time limit that had been set by Headquarters for collecting the data before opening aimed or unaimed fire had been cut almost in half by the battery.

"The battery's ready!" the gun officer's voice would usually be the first to come over the telephone wire to Dubina.

. . . One evening the regimental commander himself visited the captain at the OP.

"Both we and our neighbours," Zhigarev said to the captain, "are about fed up with that foursome. You know what I'm speaking about, don't you?"

"The four-gun German battery."

"That's right! We've wasted a few score shells on it already but it's still alive and kicking and continues to operate. . . ."

"But look here, Comrade Major, every night your sound locators and we get its coordinate and we open fire only in accordance with these data."

"Wrong data then! That's how beginners at school figure and not grown-up artillery men," objected the Major angrily. "Don't think they're fools. So far they've succeeded in bamboozling all of us, with our sound locators to boot. They keep firing one gun demonstratively all night long and we just jump at it and gleefully take its coordinate. Meanwhile the other three guns are being set up at a new fire position, and in the morning the fourth one joins it. All that's left for us to do is to pound an empty but 'located' spot. . . . To make a long story short, tonight you must get as close to the Germans as possible. Tomorrow morning, as soon as that foursome begins its fire, cover it as quickly as you can—get Bibilashvili to do it—and we'll have the whole regiment pounding it in no time in accordance with your data."

"The mission is clear. I'll get down to it right away," declared Captain Dubina after he had asked a few more questions.

Then he held an informal council with his closest assistants, Lieutenants Khlemenchuk and Pechorski. Bibilashvili was also called in.

. . . The sky was still dark, but it was the hour just before dawn. At the fire position of Captain Dubina's battery all was ready for carrying out the given assignment.

Lieutenant Fedorenko, senior in the battery, had already made the rounds of the guns for the nth time and was peering through the sight.

"Can you see the divisions on the sight clearly?" he asked gunners Smetanin, Davidenko and Schmatko in turn.

"Perfectly!" came the reply.

The crew of No. 1 gun under Bibilashvili—Smetanin, Lotsan, Petukhov, Kriyvtsov, Chikunov, Tyeplov and Plyetnev—were at ease but ready to get busy at a moment's notice. In a second they would jump from the cases of shells where they were sitting and be at their posts. Shalva Bibilashvili went from man to man and said excitedly: .

"Today is our birthday, see to it that our treat is first class, in accordance with the rules of Eastern hospitality. The first shell will be in honour of the Shot'ha Rust'hveli Prospect in Tbilisi. . . . D'you know it?"

The men smiled.

. . . Somewhere far off came the muffled boom of an enemy heavy battery.

"At your places!" the long-awaited command rang out at last. And the men rushed to the gun, merging with it in a single formidable entity.

"At the enemy battery! . . ."

"Gun No. 1 to fire! . . ."

In a twinkling Smetanin, No. 1 gunner of Gun No. 1, fused the cord. There was a brief pause and then the sharp command:

"Fire!"

The air and ground shook with the round—the first gun fired in the area of our positions. Lotsan deftly removed the hot shell case from the breach. It bounded out onto the wet grass, hissing and steaming. Petukhov



was as nimble as an athlete. With a single motion he had seized the next heavy shell and was twirling it in his hands waiting for the command.

Bibilashvili was already receiving and relaying corrections. The men worked swiftly and even a trained eye could hardly follow their movements. You could not tell when Smetanin had managed to train the gun, and Petukhov was already sending the next "cucumber" into the gun. Only the clank of the closed breach told that all was ready.

"No. 1 ready!" cried the gun officer.

"Fire!"

The second shot. It was followed by a third, a fourth and a fifth. And at this point Fedorenko shouted as he turned his face towards the line of guns:

"Battery, fire!"

Three heavy guns roared in a single voice. After the third volley the telephonist at the battery was already repeating, literally and with special expression, the message that he had received:

"Convey to the gun crew that all the guns are firing well. Special thanks to Bibilashvili. Continue fire!"

The message had come from Captain Dubina in his observation point.

The battery's next volley already merged with the general barrage opened by all arms of the regiment. This lasted only three or four minutes in all.

"Stop! Make a note of the situation!" came the last order.

An hour later we already knew exactly that the four-gun battery of the enemy had been destroyed.

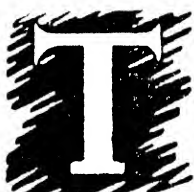
"There was a battery, the battery is no more," said the beaming Shalva Bibilashvili.



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BORIS GALIN  
NIKOLAI DENISOV

## THE BREAKTHROUGH



HE plan of effecting the breakthrough, its aims and the task that the corps would have to accomplish were all plotted on the field map. The orders had already been signed and sent out to the divisions. And the divisions knew what they had to do. The regiments too knew their missions both in respect to time and to space. Everyone was waiting for his hour to strike—from the Cossack trooper to the General.

Lieutenant General Kirichenko was sitting in the shade of a half-ruined building that had once been a school. With difficulty he had managed to squeeze his big heavy body into a school seat behind the desk. On his head was a blue cavalry cap. His Chief of Staff, Pichugin, a tall man with greying hair, was sitting opposite him at a desk that had been carved up and scratched with a penknife. Between them lay a new map on which the existing position had been plotted. But even without the map, both of them knew the terrain on which the forthcoming operations would be enacted, the highways and country lanes, the hills, cliffs and gullies, and they knew the disposition of the enemy forces whose communications they had to dislocate and destroy. But it was not enough just to know. Ability to act was also needed.

A narrow streak of flame began to rise, spreading slowly till it covered half the sky. The windows of the little cottages rattled and the ground trembled underfoot. These were our guns booming heavily and persistently, laying down an artillery preparation at the forward fringe of the German defences. Soon new sounds mingled with the din of the artillery barrage, swift, crashing blows that sounded as if giant hammers were pounding the ground. Enemy bombers were attacking. As Kirichenko gulped down his strong, scalding-hot tea, he raised his head and listened.

"That's the third sweep of Junkers already. . . ." remarked Pichugin.

Kirichenko looked westward in the direction where all was roaring. He thought with anxiety about his corps, which at that hour had dashed forward openly to the line of the breakthrough. On that hour depended the fate of the whole operation. And Kirichenko felt this with his old Cossack heart. The Germans might discover the corps ahead of time, after all it was not a needle in a haystack! And then everything would fly to the devil. The whole point of the breakthrough would be lost and they would be deprived of its trump card, the element of surprise. There was also another danger: the corps might sustain heavy losses as a result of the bombing before it advanced to the breakthrough.

The operation could be divided into three phases. The first phase consisted in bringing up the cavalry and concentrating it behind our infantry. The second phase was a vigorous spearthrust by the cavalry into the breach. The third and final phase was operation in depth. In the first phase everything depended on secrecy. At first the cavalry divisions would advance like the outspread fingers of a hand. On making contact with the enemy these fingers would close in a fist.

All day the horses had been standing in the corn fields. The huge open fields stretched for many kilometres to the East, North and South. On the West were hills overlooking the whole area in which the cavalry was secretly concentrating. Fighting was raging quite near the corn fields. Our infantry were attacking, clearing a way for the cavalry.

The horses, *tachankas*, guns and mortars were all well camouflaged from the eyes of the enemy. The horses were standing in the old trenches, shelters were dug in the ground for the *tachankas* and guns, while the Cossacks camouflaged themselves and the horses with corn and straw. The field looked lifeless. The men scarcely moved. If a squadron had to send a message to Regimental Headquarters, the runner or officer would crawl the whole distance as if he were under fire. The radio was not being used. Everything was immobilized before the big push. Sweep after sweep of German aircraft streaked through the sky. They made their bombing runs over the corn. The horses trembled at the noise of the engines and the howl of the bombs. These were war horses, but, like the men, they felt a heavy, oppressive sensation. Their eyes bloodshot, they kept tossing their manes uneasily and the horseholders stuffed their caps into the animals' jaws to stop their whinnying.

Still the army corps commander did not give the order to attack: the time was not yet ripe. The cavalry would have to wait until the infantry and the artillery had carried out their mission, until they had breached the German defences and opened a road for the cavalry and tanks. And then—not a moment of delay! At the moment, however, only one thing was demanded of them, patience, patience, patience. If they would stand still until night under the fire of enemy aircraft, thereby retaining in their hands their sharpest weapon—surprise—there would be no doubt about the successful outcome of their mission. The cavalry would charge through the gap in the German defences, strike at them from the rear, dislocate communications between the enemy units and control, sow panic among them, split them up and with the assistance of tanks and infantry surround and annihilate them.

On the previous day, when one of the Staff officers had grumbled that the infantry was fussing around too long, the General had cut him short sternly: "They're working for us," he remarked. "And perhaps their job is the hardest. . . ."

What Kirichenko wished for was that the infantry would complete its assignment before night. Under cover of night the Cossacks could advance far ahead.

From time to time the General got in touch with Headquarters of the X formation. One question interested him: how soon would the infantry finish its work of blazing a path for the cavalry? The commander of this formation reassured him:

"Have patience, your turn will come."

The most difficult time was these hours before leading the corps into the breach. The divisional commanders were perfectly well aware of this. It was not the first time that they were fighting together in one corps. They had become experts in the art of forcing a breach, had led cavalry raids behind the German lines both in the Kuban and in the Mozdok steppes. They called their corps commander "Father." Kirichenko was their senior both in years and in experience. He was indeed as fond of them as if they were his own sons and he knew the worth of each. They were generals—commanders of Cossack divisions. And they had the same traits as lived in the souls of the Cossacks they commanded—a quick mind, daring, persistence, pride, self-esteem and a sense of honour. Like a true cavalryman Kirichenko, an old and experienced military commander, knew the character of each one of them to perfection, knew what interested each one, what they were capable of, what could be demanded of each one, when they had to be restrained and when, on the contrary, they had to be given free rein, with implicit faith in their instinct and ability.

One may be sure that when he made Tutarinov's division the vanguard in the breakthrough, giving them the task of trying out the way for the other units, he had taken into account Tutarinov's character and that of his officers. The young General Tutarinov, lively and energetic, was fully capable of coping with this task. And not only was he up to this mission, but his very soul was in it, for being in the vanguard was something that was in line with his whole character.

Tutarinov loved fighting. It was in his blood, in the blood of the Astrakhan Cossack from the stanitsa of Krasny Yar. He had been named Ivan after his grandfather, Ivan Ilyich Tutarinov, a Cossack who had fought under Skobelev. The grandson still remembered his grandfather, strong as an oak, remembered his Kirghiz bay charger and the sword that had been handed down from ancient days.

When the war broke out, Tutarinov had been serving on the western border, at Brest-Litovsk. On June 22 at 4 a.m. the Germans had opened fire. A shell had gone through the big window of the house where the brigade staff officer Tutarinov lived. From that hour he had begun fighting the Germans. In all this time he had been in the rear only one month, when his Cossack division had been formed. He is not exaggerating when he says with flashing eyes: "It's fine, isn't it?"

The division's present task was an honour. Tutarinov understood excellently just how responsible it was, the risk it involved and what he had to expect. Hot-headed, impatient, he nevertheless kept himself in hand and tried not to betray his excitement in any way. His favourite horse "Sunrise" was wounded by a stray splinter. He took leave of his horse before it was taken away to the veterinary station. For a long time he stood in the twilight listening to the retreating sound of artillery fire. That was a good sign. It meant that the line of the German defences had been breached. Tutarinov's spirits rose. He sent for the commander of the tank group and for the commander of the leading regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Karapetyan. At any moment the signal to advance might be given. Once again Tutarinov, Karapetyan and the tank officer went over the details of the order in which they were to charge into the breach, the signals to be given by radio, rockets and tracer bullets. He said to Karapetyan what had been said to him by General Kirichenko:

"Your task is to go forward irrespective of everything. There will be Germans to right of you and Germans to left of you—to hell with them. . . . Your job is to keep going!"

He had a last conference with the regimental commanders. It was decided not to send Cossack scouts out in order not to betray that a Cossack corps was going into action. On no account must the Germans know beforehand that Cossacks were attacking here. They would feel it all the more forcefully far in the rear. The task of reconnoitring devolved on the tankmen.

When the long-awaited hour arrived Tutarinov breathed a sigh of relief. High time! It was nine o'clock in the evening. Tutarinov gave the signal to the gunners. Immediately all the guns opened a raking fire from right and left. The cavalry regiment advanced into the narrow gap between two walls of artillery fire. Tutarinov stood beside the regimental commander watching the tanks and the leading squadrons, under Romanyuk and Kuznetsov, pass. The horses and gun carriages were soon lost in the darkness. Throwing his arms around the shoulders of the tall, swarthy Karapetyan, Tutarinov wished him luck.

When Tutarinov informed Kirichenko by radio that the division had entered the breach, the General, usually calm and restrained, struck his palm with his fist and exclaimed gaily:

"Now we're being Cossacks! Now we're living! . . ."

It required all the Cossack verve, daring, and ability to take a risk and size up the situation quickly to charge into the gap. That is why Tutarinov had sent Karapetyan's regiment ahead. The latter was an old cavalryman and had seen service in the Civil War. He knew and loved his regiment, and in the fighting the regiment learned to know and love its commander. In addition to the splendid traits of a Cossack—daring and stamina—the regimental commander possessed traits that enabled him to direct the fervent Cossack character, tempestuous as the Kuban River, into the required channel. He was an officer with sober judgement, a man with a warm heart and a cool head.

The night was black as pitch. Captain Novikov's tanks and Captain Kuznetsov's cavalry squadron led the way past the sleeping hamlets. The

silence was broken by the roar of engines and clatter of hoofs. Their road led them through a village in which the unsuspecting Germans were sleeping soundly.

"Please don't wake them," Karapetyan ordered Kuznetsov. "They're sleeping, which is all to the good. If they wake, of course, that's a different story. . . ."

The Cossacks were in light battle order, just horse and man. They had left their felt cloaks, Cossack hoods and capes with the second echelon transport. In the darkness horse and rider merged into one.

The tankmen liked this night thrust into the German lair. From time to time Captain Novikov stuck his head out of the hatch of his tank and looked round: he was afraid that the Cossacks would be left behind. But the Cossacks were keeping up with them.

Tutarinov was in the centre of the division together with his staff. During this first half of the night the situation was not clear to him. Later on, of course, an explanation was found for everything and all became crystal clear when it was entered on the map and formed part of a report. But just then a great deal was rather hazy. Where was Karapetyan? Had he gone far ahead? Why was he silent? . . . The night and the fog merely served to increase his apprehensions. And Tutarinov sped forward in a car after Karapetyan. Entering the cottage in which the regimental control post was housed, he threw off his felt cape, which hampered his movements, and rapidly asked with a smile:

"What's the good news?"

Karapetyan would have been overjoyed to say something pleasant, but he did not exaggerate and replied honestly and frankly:

"Kuznetsov is silent. Everything is quiet on the road, only occasional shots can be heard."

"And is that all?"

"That's all," said Karapetyan, and again assured him: "The regiment will carry out its mission."

He sent his signal officer forward to Kuznetsov. Moved by solicitude for his divisional commander, he remarked gently that the General was in danger here. Tutarinov replied sharply and curtly:

"I know when and where I have to be."

Karapetyan did not refer to the subject again. His regiment had the key to the night operation and the divisional commander considered that he had to be with him at the moment.

Kuznetsov soon sent word of himself. The desultory firing from the left and right began to die down, which meant that the most dangerous zone—the neck of the breach—had already been left behind. Now they should be coming across a village in their road. But however much they peered into the darkness the Cossacks could see no sign of a village. Kuznetsov was already beginning to have doubts as to whether they had not missed the way. The first deafening blast in the darkness cheered him up. The shot had come from in front of them, and by the sound Kuznetsov could tell that it came from a German rifle. The cavalry pushed on another score metres and then there was no longer any doubt that ahead of them lay the garrison which the

squadron had to wipe out in order to clear a road for the whole regiment and after the regiment for the division.

The German-occupied village that had been hidden in the night betrayed itself by the frequent flashes of machine-gun and rifle fire coming from it. Sensing that something was wrong, the alarmed German patrols had opened uncontrolled fire. Success now depended on seconds. Kuznetsov dismounted his squadron and led his men into the village. To the tank commander he said:

"You stay here and make a noise. . . ."

The roaring of the tank engines on the road would make the flustered Germans believe that the place was swarming with Russian tanks. Meanwhile the dismounted Cossacks would descend on the garrison and a vigorous hand-to-hand encounter would clinch matters.

That is what actually happened. Everything was over in a quarter of an hour. From the centre of the village, Kuznetsov sent a rocket soaring into the dark sky. This was the signal to the horseholders and tankmen that the road was clear. The regiment continued its advance. Over ten kilometres lay between them and the German forward positions. The Cossacks rode southward behind the German lines and parallel to the front, cutting across road after road.

Suddenly they heard the roar of an engine. The Cossacks signalled with a torch for the truck to stop. The truck came to a halt. It was a big German five-ton truck with high sides. A wholly unsuspecting feldwebel jumped down from the driver's seat, screwing up his eyes in the dazzling light.

Thunderstruck at what he saw, the German asked:

"Russians?"

"Yes, Cossacks," Kuznetsov assured him.

The feldwebel reported humbly that he was bringing up a hot supper to the herr officers at the forward positions. Kuznetsov had no time to bother with the German and his suppers. He put a tankman in the truck and they drove it to Karapetyan. Karapetyan was both delighted and astonished when the tankman delivered Kuznetsov's field report and hot suppers in German thermos containers. It became clear to him that things were going well with Kuznetsov. He invited Tutarinov to have a bite with him. Just then a report came over the radio from Regimental Commander Pushkarev, who was following on behind, to the effect that the Germans had cut off his road. The Germans had filtered in between Pushkarev and Karapetyan. The situation had become more complicated. But the divisional commander was in excellent spirits. Now he knew exactly where the enemy was and could take counter-measures. To Karapetyan he gave complete freedom of action: to move ahead and clear the road. True, he took from Karapetyan one squadron and the tanks that he held in reserve, and hurled them against the Germans who had cut the road. The squadron and the tanks attacked from the rear while Pushkarev's regiments made a frontal assault. Pressed in from two sides, the Germans fled.

It was beginning to dawn, when Karapetyan reported in a hoarse voice:

"The regiment has accomplished its mission."

In the course of that night he had made a spearthrust of thirty-five

kilometres into the enemy rear. When Corps Headquarters learned of Karapetyan's operations, General Pichugin's usually reserved face beamed. A regular staff officer, he was a bit sceptical with regard to reports. But he had faith in Karapetyan. The latter was not the sort to embroider. He always told the truth even when the truth was unpleasant. Thus Karapetyan's regiment had carried out the mission it had been given. The Cossacks had taken advantage of the surprise and a road had been cleared for the corps. New forces had to be sent into action. Pichugin pulled the map over to himself. He moved his fingers as if he were playing on the piano.

"And now we'll play as if on a clavichord," he said as he gave the order for the other units to move into the breach.

At dawn Tutarinov took up a position on Chalk Hill. It overlooked an undulating steppe overgrown with withered, yellow grass. Through the haze something was moving over the steppe. Squadron Commander Romanuk galloped up, and leaning from his saddle whispered something to Karapetyan. The latter glanced in the direction of the steppe.

"How many?" he asked.

"Five hundred," said Romanuk.

Karapetyan went over to the divisional commander. Tutarinov, bending over a map, was giving Regimental Commander Pushkarev his instructions. Karapetyan waited patiently. The fog was slowly dispersing. Whatever it was coming over the steppe towards the hill began to take on form and now it was possible to see a large group of Germans led by a mounted Cossack. The Germans were marching with raised hands.

The Lieutenant Colonel turned respectfully to the divisional commander.

"Comrade General," he said, "please accept a gift from the regiment: the Germans surrendered."

The General turned abruptly. He stared for a long time at the hazy steppe over which the sun had risen, at the distant mounds and the Germans who were slowly shambling along.

"Wonderful picture!" he exclaimed, and after a brief silence turned to Pushkarev. "Well then, you will have to march strictly on a bearing. Your task. . . ."

A new day dawned and a new phase of the battle, fierce and relentless, began. To right and to left, in front and behind, the squadrons and regiments of the cavalry corps had a strong and cruel enemy, infuriated by the mere thought that the Cossacks had penetrated into his lair. How many times the Germans had pursued these very same Kuban Cossacks, tried to surround them, yet each time the Russians had managed to slip away. Now the Cossacks themselves, at their own desire, were in the midst of German troops and were delivering sudden blows from the rear, shattering the well-ordered system of German defences. To gain time was to gain space. Tutarinov had gained time: in one night he had penetrated to the rear of the German units and reached the line of their communications. The first phase of the operation—pouring cavalry and tanks into the breach—had been accomplished successfully. Now everything depended on the rate at which the other divisions of the corps moved, on how they deployed, on their initiative, flexibility and manœuvrability.



During the summer campaign of 1943, the tactics of flanking drives and the art of manœuvring for encirclements had become a regular feature in our military practice and theory. According to the plan of the Supreme Command, the Kuban Cossack corps together with tank units, infantry and artillery, had as its task to complete the encirclement of the group of German troops on their sector of the front. The formula for encirclement was very simple: surround, divide, destroy. To effect this a great deal was required, but above all ability to manœuvre on the field of battle. Kirichenko intended—and this was the crux of his plan—that one division would drive, another smash and a third take over and complete the destruction.

From the moment when Tutarinov had cut a lane through the German lines and the units of the corps together with the tanks, straddling the road, had disrupted the communications of the enemy group, its main nerve—that of control—had been paralysed. Every German unit operating within a range of ninety kilometres had been cut off and left to its own devices. The enemy was cut off from his bases. A German staff officer who was taken prisoner and questioned concerning the fighting power of his panzer division replied gloomily:

“When you took me prisoner, you settled the fate of our division.”

“Why so?” asked Kirichenko.

“I supply them with fuel and ammunition,” replied the German briefly.

Fuel and ammunition and ration dumps had already been captured by our men. This, however, was not the main thing. The strict injunction of the General to remember the main thing, to remember the enemy, was firmly fixed in the mind of every Cossack.

They had still a long way to go to victory. Only the bare outlines of the battle on the decisive sectors were visible as yet. Everything was jumbled on Pichugin's field map. It would have been almost impossible for the layman to make head or tail of this labyrinth of lines, circles, dots and shadings in coloured pencils of every hue. The heavy arrows denoting the directions of the divisions' main drive were intersected in many places with blue dotted lines. On the smooth surface of the map were crimson ellipsoids, the dispositions of the squadron, either moving ahead or surrounded by the blue horseshoes of the German mobile infantry. The black diamonds of tanks stood out in this intricate design of the situation on the field, showing at a glance the movement of the German mechanized units which the enemy had hurled into a counter-attack on the flanks and rear of the Cossacks.

But the Cossacks were themselves hitting out at the enemy flanks and rear, and they had their own tanks. They had already cut off from their units and destroyed the bases of three German infantry divisions and one tank division, as well as the army dumps of a large formation of Germans. On their way the Cossacks ate bread that had been baked by German bakers whom they had taken prisoner. They ate Dutch chocolate, made soup and mincemeat from meat intended for German tankmen and infantry. The Cossacks set fire to barrels, drums and tanks of gasoline which the German Command had stored up for their tank divisions, blew up and destroyed dumps of cartridges, shells, bombs and other military stores, completely gutting the bases of the enemy infantry divisions. They severed

telephone and telegraph lines, sent German five-ton trucks loaded with army stores flying into the ditches.

At noon Kirichenko held a "reception" at his Headquarters in the grassy steppes. Forty-four German officers, taken prisoner by the various regiments, were brought to him. From them the corps commander learned all that he needed to know about the enemy.

"Cossacks, tanks!" Like the wind the words swept over the steppes, sowing panic everywhere. The rumour that the Cossacks had broken through acted on the enemy as drastically as a sword or a bullet.

Fighting began to break out everywhere: ahead, left and right, on the flanks and in the rear. German bombers arrived on the scene. The engines of Heinkels roared as they flew at an altitude beyond the range of the anti-aircraft guns of the Cossack regiments. With the pedantic thoroughness natural to the Germans, they had divided up the whole area occupied by Kirichenko's corps into squares and showered hundreds of high explosive and shrapnel bombs into each square. They dropped leaflets in which they announced that they were going to make a fabulous number of sorties, that they had been ordered practically by Göring himself to wipe the raiding Cossacks from the face of the earth.

The Cossacks dug in. Many horses were killed in the steppes. The men grieved over them as over friends and comrades. "Liza" was severely wounded, "Faithful" was killed, "Dashing," the favourite of the corps, a clean-limbed racehorse who cleared a barrier so beautifully, was wounded.

The situation had become more difficult, but the Cossacks continued to press forward, continued to strike at the Germans from the flanks and the rear. These blows were struck at the enemy by the whole corps, by every division, every regiment, every squadron. Near one village the Germans concentrated approximately a battalion of infantry supported by tanks, and under cover of this force tried to get some two hundred truckloads of ammunition through to their cut-off divisions. By a flanking movement along a gully, Captain Nazarchuk's squadron made a sudden attack on the Germans. The Cossacks whooped and whistled as they launched their daring assault. Nazarchuk had no time to count the number of Germans his squadron mowed down in this tempestuous charge. He only had time to enter the number "200" in his field notebook. This was the number of officers and men taken prisoner and sent back to the regimental commander.

The more circles and lines appeared on the field map and the more jumbled, at first glance, the situation appeared, the clearer the final objective of the operation actually became. The enemy garrisons wiped out en route, the army and divisional bases mopped up were only the beginning of the last phase of the thrust. The main task was still before them. And in this seething cauldron it was necessary to find the main point of the battle and never for a moment to let control be lost. Far away to the left of the Cossacks, where the German line of defence lay, the booming of artillery grew fiercer and fiercer. The wind brought the breath of a great battle from that direction, of the heavy fighting waged by our infantry against the German divisions manning the defences. Deprived of their bases and knowing that the terrible Cossacks were operating in their rear, the Ger-



"YABLOCHKO," SAILORS' JIG

Oil Painting by Alexander Bubnov



**FIGHTING OFF AN AIR-RAID AT SEA**

*Pencil Drawing by Vladimir Sokolov*

man infantry, huddling in their trenches and dugouts, were unable to withstand the pressure of our forces for long. Kirichenko realized this. He made a close study of all that was going on here, on the roads in the enemy's rear, which were straddled and controlled by his corps. His military instinct, his analysis of all the little details, reconnaissance, scores of signs that would mean nothing to another person, all told the General that the mass retreat of the Germans from their fortified positions must be expected at any hour.

Kirichenko had a clear picture of the crisis in the morale of the Germans when he moved to a new command post together with his mobile operations staff. What happened was that the new owners moved into their headquarters while the old ones were still stamping about not far off, not knowing in which direction to run.

"There's a house-warming for you," said Pichugin pointing to the German tanks and waggons mulling about near the command post, only some half a mile away.

And even though he went through a few anxious moments for the control post and for the safety of their headquarters, on which the terror-crazed Germans might stumble, still Kirichenko was jubilant: the enemy was scurrying about, sensing that he had been caught in a trap.

"Splendid! . . ." exclaimed Kirichenko.

Now it was necessary to foresee everything: where the German units would rush to, who would intercept them and where, at what spot it would be easiest to smash them. The corps staff had to think both for itself and for an enemy who would put up a desperate fight.

From a tactical success the thrust had begun to assume the proportions of an operation which would decide the fate of a large formation of Germans on a wide front.

The Cossack corps proved able to take advantage of the conditions for operating in the German rear that had been created by our infantry and mechanized forces. These conditions offered them every chance for success. In their turn, by making use of these advantages, the Cossacks created new opportunities for our infantry and tanks in their battle for the annihilation of the German Taganrog army group. It was this interaction and mutual support that lay at the foundation of the Cossack raid, the successful outcome of which was possible only thanks to the previously agreed on joint blows of Cossacks and infantry, which ensured the rout of the enemy. The honour of operating in the very centre of hostilities fell to the lot of the Kuban Cossack corps. The infantry had begun. The Cossacks together with the valiant Stalingrad tankmen continued and developed the operation. It was now clear that the German Taganrog group was surrounded. But this was not enough. It was necessary to wipe this group out.

In its desperate rush back, in its urgent desire to reach the next line of defence as quickly as possible, the avalanche of the retreating enemy might cut up the corps and break its way through, thereby cancelling the whole point of the thrust, of the raid that had begun so successfully. It was the task of the Cossacks to do the cutting up and destroying, to

cut up the Germans themselves, to surround and destroy the Germans in collaboration with the infantry, which was advancing from the East, squeezing the enemy in a tight vise.

Kirichenko explained and formulated all this in his order to the divisions. Tutarinov was the first to feel the pressure of the enemy, who had turned about so that he was now facing the Cossacks. Thrusting at the Germans from the flank he drove deep wedges into their positions. The other units of the corps would have to finish what Tutarinov had begun, that is, cut the enemy up into groups by bold attacks, wiping out each one separately. If the Germans did manage to find a loophole and slip through, they would find General Millerov's Cossacks on their probable line of retreat.

On that day Karapetyan took ill. He was feverish at first, then suddenly went blind. He had lost his eyesight as a result of the terrific nervous strain to which he had been subjected all these days and nights preceding the thrust of his regiment into the breach. This grey-haired, elderly man burned like a bright clear flame in battle, and in this case took on himself the entire risk, the entire responsibility that had fallen to the lot of his leading regiment. No longer young, his health undermined by wounds, he collapsed. Political Officer Shakin, an elderly Kuban Cossack, his friend and second in command, said to him:

"You're simply burning up, you must be running a high temperature."

"It'll pass," murmured Karapetyan slowly, licking his parched lips. "I have to carry out my mission."

His gaunt face was flushed with fever. He tossed about on a greatcoat that had been spread on some hay and said in a hoarse whisper:

"I told the General that the regiment would accomplish its mission."

At Karapetyan's side, the Chief of Staff and Shakin held council on how the regiment was to operate further. He heard their voices, but much as he strained his eyes he could not see them. Dimly, as through a mist, the wraith-like figures of his friends swayed before him. Towards evening his temperature rose still higher. Tutarinov came galloping up. This was his finest regiment and Karapetyan his best commander, his hope and his mainstay. From the doorway he called out to Karapetyan:

"What's the matter? Can't you see me, old chap?"

Karapetyan made no reply. Tutarinov bent over him.

"I cannot see," said Karapetyan slowly.

Flaring up, Tutarinov came down on the commanders: why had they kept silent, why hadn't they informed him of Karapetyan's illness before? In his usual soft, gentle voice, Karapetyan murmured:

"Please don't worry, Comrade General, the regiment will carry out its mission."

Tutarinov sent Karapetyan off to the hospital in a car and told the adjutant who was accompanying him to do all in his power to find doctors who would return Karapetyan's eyesight to him.

Karapetyan sighed deeply.

"To leave the regiment at such a time. . . . There's so much work ahead. . . ."

Just as Kirichenko had anticipated, when the Germans began to retreat along the northern road under pressure of our infantry from the East, they were intercepted by Tutarinov's and Golovsky's regiments. On encountering the Cossacks, the whole flood of enemy materiel and men turned left, along the southern route. They were allowed to go on for several kilometres. This was done deliberately.

"They won't go far," said Kirichenko. "They're in a trap."

Then the Germans turned to the West, to a river crossing, not knowing that it had long been in the hands of the Cossacks. The bridgehead was held by Major Minakov's regiment.

But it was on Millerov's division that the main blow of the retreating enemy descended. Kirichenko had moved this division onto the main road of the German retreat. The brunt of the fighting fell to its lot. Kirichenko had hurried it to the places for which the Germans were heading. This division would have to withstand the whole assault of enemy tanks, artillery and infantry, hold back this avalanche that was trying to fight its way through the Cossack ring. This division would have to act as an anvil on which all the blows of the Germans would fall. The choice had not been a chance one. Divisional Commander Millerov and his men had a priceless trait—stamina and grit. The other units of the corps were also staunch and steadfast in battle, but in the opinion of Kirichenko these traits were most clearly expressed in Millerov's division. People who know say that you can judge the character of troops by that of their commander. Millerov was always calm, never lost his head even in the most critical moments of the fighting, when the scales were evenly balanced, a man who remained persistent, courageous and self-possessed even in the most trying moments.

At the very first news that the enemy, having encountered Tutarinov, had bounced to one side like a rubber ball and, still in possession of strong forces, was rolling to Millerov's line, the Chief of Staff had stated with evident satisfaction:

"That is the very thing which was to be proved."

Millerov sent a radio message to Kirichenko: "Germans moving sixty tanks to my sector." The General realized that things must be going hard with him if he had reported this fact. The movement of the Germans in his direction had been foreseen by the plan. That was as it should be: the Germans were going where they should be going according to our plan. This, however, could scarcely console the divisional commander. Sixty German tanks and self-propelled guns, opening fire on his positions from the line of march, were a force to be reckoned with and a real threat. The tanks and guns might succeed in gnawing a way out of the trap.

The first part of the operative plan had been realized: the enemy had gone where he had been expected to go. Now it was necessary to display particular accuracy in tactics and to manœuvre quickly and effectively. On the map it was easy enough to change the positions of regiments, guns and tanks and to put them where they were wanted. But what flexibility of thought and manœuvrability of men and materiel were required to move that mass of Cossacks, tanks, guns and ammunition, fuel and supplies quickly along roads that were being bombed by the enemy! And yet it was done.

One hundred guns, self-propelled artillery, tanks, armoured cars, and Cossacks encountered the German mailed fist on this particular sector.

The enemy loosed the full fire power of his artillery and tanks on the Cossacks, and at this point they showed him clearly just what the Cossack is. The Cossack is not only a man in a shaggy felt cloak and a hood that flutters in the wind while his sword flashes as he dashes forward in a cavalry charge. All this is indeed true of the Cossack at the proper time and under definite conditions of battle. But there is something else about the Cossack: ability to adjust himself to fighting on foot.

"The Cossack will dig himself a fox-hole, spread it with grass and fight to the last bullet. That's the Kuban Cossack!" said General Kirichenko when he was informed that the Cossacks manning the line in the direction of the main drive were standing their ground and holding fast.

The Germans could pass only over their dead bodies, but wherever there was at least one Cossack alive the road was closed to the Germans by a bullet, a grenade and where necessary by his body.

It was a sad moment for Karapetyan when he learned that during the night squadron commander Pokotilo had been killed while leading the Cossacks into an attack. The squadron Communist Party organizer took over the command when Pokotilo fell. Then the Party organizer was killed, and Captain Kochubey, the son of a famous Civil War hero, came to the rescue of his squadron. That is how the Cossacks fought.

. . . The morale of the German soldiers had been undermined. The great expanses of the boundless steppe terrified the Germans. They imagined danger everywhere, and everywhere they were in fear of the Cossacks.

. . . To Kirichenko the whole of this great expanse of steppeland with the distant horizons was like a huge chessboard. Every move had to be well thought out, and he had to have a clear idea of the consequences of the move, how the enemy would parry, when and where to check and mate him.

The furious attacks of the German infantry, supported by sixty tanks, were repulsed. Millerov drew a breath of relief.

"Well, it looks like the worst is over."

He reported the situation to the corps commander over the telephone and Kirichenko asked him:

"And how do you feel?"

"I feel as if I've just come out of a shower bath," shouted Millerov in answer, "after a shower that was both hot and cold. . . ."

"That's good for the constitution," Kirichenko consoled him. "You'll find your second shower easier to stand."

Millerov pricked up his ears. Another shower? He knew that "Father" never spoke idly. He could expect another attack on the old line, where the last attack had been repulsed, although an attack on the flank was also not out of the question. Kirichenko moved part of his forces there. General Tanaschishin sent some of his Stalingrad tankmen as support. It was a good thing that this was done in time. It was a good thing that both the division and Tanaschishin's tanks moved and acted swiftly. Any delay would have cost dear.

We shall not touch on all the details of the co-operation between the



Kuban Cossacks and the Stalingrad tank units. But they accomplished their mission in close collaboration. The Cossacks spoke of General Tanaschishin's tankmen with respect.

"They will never let you down!" they said.

The spectre of complete rout loomed before the Germans, haunted them, weighed them down like a nightmare. Still they did not abandon hope of breaking through. Concentrating 150 tanks into a spearhead, they thrust it at the hinge of two Cossack units. With this spear thrust they hoped to pierce a way out for themselves.

The steppe echoed with the low and menacing voice of engines, and flashes spurted like sheet lightning. Once again Kirichenko concentrated guns and tanks in one spot and gave the order to stand to the death. This battle was the deciding one. If we could hold out here the Germans would be played out, would recoil like a spring and be caught in the iron clutches of two other divisions, which would complete their destruction. The General knew the German breed; they were strong enough so long as they were meeting with success, but if their luck turned, they soon lost heart.

The General was sitting in a corner of the room, his eyes half closed, and dozing. The walls of the house shook and the wind brought the sound of distant firing. Suddenly the window lit up with a glaring, ominous light. A rocket had flared up in the field. A young Staff officer was sitting at the telephone. Information came in irregularly.

"It's dragging out somehow," said the officer in a whisper.

"And what did you expect?" asked Kirichenko opening his eyes. "One, two and in the king's row. . . . That rarely happens. Just blindly jumping ahead won't get you far. You have to sweat over it, my lad, sweat."

• Two things worried Kirichenko.

While concentrating his attention on Millerov's sector, he had not for a moment forgotten about Minakov. Millerov was putting up a plucky fight, but how were things going with Minakov? Where was he? What if this regiment would be forced out of its position, leaving the crossing open and letting the Germans out of the trap? Short field reports had come in from Minakov: "Holding out. Standing fast. Fighting against superior enemy forces." Then connections had been broken. Minakov had just managed to report that he was fighting in semi-encirclement. After that silence had fallen. The dispatch rider was a long time in getting to Minakov.

Kirichenko had given Millerov everything: men and guns. Tanaschishin's tanks were co-operating with him. He had nothing with which to help Minakov just now. The latter would have to hold out with his own forces until the crisis on Millerov's sector had passed and he could throw the forces that would thus be released to the bridgehead.

At last the long-awaited dispatch rider returned from Minakov. Kirichenko called out to him:

"Quick, how are things going with him?"

The dispatch rider blurted out all in one breath:

"He's holding out, fighting, he's taken at least a thousand officers and men prisoner!"

"How? What? Why, he's half surrounded himself?!"

"Exactly," replied the officer spreading out a map. "Now on this side they had squeezed him in and he was half surrounded. But here Minakov surrounded a German regiment in his turn and forced them to surrender."

Kirichenko burst out laughing.

"That's Minakov for you! In all the time I've been in the service I must say that I've never heard of an enemy surrendering to a regiment that was half surrounded itself. Beautiful, eh?"

Difficult as it was, Minakov's regiment repulsed all the German attacks. And here a chance mistake came to the aid of Minakov. The figure "38" was the unlucky number of the commander of a German infantry regiment. At one time this German officer had fought against a Russian cavalry division whose number was 38. Now a cavalry unit with the number 138 was in front of him. His eyes grew round with fear. Knowing that other Russian units were operating in his rear and assuming that he was threatened with an attack from both sides, the German regimental commander mistook Minakov for his old acquaintance and the mere thought of this proved enough to take the ground from under his feet. His morale broken, he called together his officers and informed them of his intention. He told them that a Russian division that they had already encountered was fighting against them, told them that they were helpless, that they would be mown down, and that it was necessary to surrender.

And they laid down their arms, a thousand Germans who took Minakov's regiment for a whole division. Truth to tell, Minakov himself was dumbfounded by this turn of events. But he did not show it. On the contrary, taking this in the normal course of events, he merely tried to accelerate the process of taking over the German regiment as prisoners. He had every reason to hurry. He had to control the fighting, to repulse attacks. The situation was serious enough and to cap it all here were these thousand Germans who had to be sent off as quickly as possible, away from this perilous sector.

The commander of the surrendering German regiment asked to see the commander of the Russian division. With an insinuating smile he remarked that the former was an old acquaintance of his. Minakov wondered what on earth he was talking about, there was no divisional commander here.

"Most likely you're acting on the authority of the commander of the 38th Division? . . ." the German asked.

"I'm operating on my own," replied Minakov. "I'm boss here. I'm the commander of the 138th Regiment."

"Regiment?" exclaimed the horrified German. He tore his hair in despair. Damn them! He had been deceived! The Russians had played a dirty trick on him. He had surrendered to a division and here was only a regiment! . . .

The incident at the bridgehead was, as it were, an apotheosis to the thrust. The Russian Cossacks were masters of the steppe. Together with the infantry and the tanks, they had gained the upper hand over the rabid wolf that raced about the steppes, his strength ebbing away, dripping with blood. But the traps had been well set and many Germans lost their lives in those great fields.

. . . By the end of August the forces of the Southern Front finally wiped

out the surrounded units of the German Taganrog army group. The 17th, 111th and 294th Infantry Divisions and the 15th Airborne German Division were wiped out. The 304th, 306th and 336th Infantry Divisions and the 13th Tank Division sustained heavy losses. In the rear of many of these divisions General Kirichenko's Kuban Cossacks and General Tanaschishin's Stalingrad tankmen had made bold raids. In the fierce battles here, the forces of the Southern Front destroyed over 200 enemy aircraft, over 500 tanks and 500 guns. The Germans lost upwards of 35,000 officers and men killed. Over 5,000 Germans were taken prisoner. Large quantities of materiel were captured. The rout of the German Taganrog group proved a heavy blow to the German army in the South. The bold manoeuvres of Kirichenko's cavalrymen and Tanaschishin's tankmen created the conditions that made it possible for our forces to inflict this major defeat on the Germans.

When the corps had finished operations for this thrust a delegation visited them from Checheno-Ingushetia. They brought gifts for the Cossacks, grapes, new wine, cheese and melons.

Among the delegates was an old highlander with clear, kindly eyes. He walked softly, with an easy gait. When they met, the General commanding the corps and the old Ossetian, they stood in silence for a long time, looking at each other.

"Do you recognize me?" asked Kirichenko.

The Ossetian recognized him. This was the Russian who had been his friend during the Civil War. At one time Kirichenko had presented him with his sword. The old man had treasured it all these years. . . . Now he held it out to the General, saying:

"So you recognize it?"

When the echo of the salute fired in Moscow in honour of the Cossack corps reached the mountains, the old man came down to the valley to look for Kirichenko and give him back his sword.

"When you look at it you will recall your youth," he said to the General. "When you touch it you will become younger in spirit."

They strolled off together, reminiscing about their youth, that fine, happy time. Then the General unfolded a map and told the old man about the thrust.

We saw that map. Baldly and precisely it told the story of the operation. Somebody remarked that a time will come when the history of the Great Patriotic War will be studied and written in the light of these maps of regiments, divisions, army corps and armies.



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LEONID SOBOLEV

## MAKING A MAN OF HIM



ASHING dishes, as everyone knows, is a dirty job and something that one gets fed up with, particularly if one has to do it day in and day out. But in the small ward-room galley of the torpedo boat with which this story deals there was a certain rather intricate apparatus for this purpose which radically altered matters.

This apparatus occupied the right hand corner of the galley, where a shining copper samovar, standing on a zinc-plated tray, hissed out steam, a small samovar, it is true, but wicked, constantly snorting sparks and boiling hot. The tray on which it stood was covered with wire racks for dishes; there were little nests for tumblers and a special hanging compartment for knives and forks. Over all this hung an intricate system of copper pipes with little holes drilled in them, the pipes being attached by a rubber hose to the faucet of the samovar. Through the holes streams of boiling water squirted over the racks in strong, even-flowing jets, which washed the dishes clean of grease, the sticky remains of stewed fruit and condensed milk—the latter being a particular favourite with the Commissar of the torpedo boat. Disdainfully leaving the water to do the dirty work, Andrei Krotkikh, the ward-room orderly, would go into the tiny cabin which bore the proud title of "Commanders' Saloon," and while he was changing the white tablecloth for a flowered one in token of the fact that the Commander and Commissar had finished their meal, the first part of his work would finish itself without him. Upon returning, he would soap a narrow, long-handled brush and with the same disdainful expression on his face swoosh it around the wire racks of plates, rinse away the soapsuds with the hose and then turn off the water. In the hot air of the close galley the dishes dried of themselves, and all that remained was to put the gleaming plates and sparkling glasses in their proper place so that they would not fall when the ship rolled. And only the fighting steel of the knives and forks required a towel—so that they would not rust.

This ingenious automatic machine was born of the mortification that ate into the soul of Andrei Krotkikh, Red sailor and Young Communist League member. He loathed dirty dishes as the symbol of an unsuccessful life. The fact was that the other men of his class who had been called up were training to look after engines, to fire guns, to stand at the wheel, while to him had fallen the strange naval duty of washing dishes. The reason for this was that Krotkikh, who had been raised on a distant collective farm in the Altai, had decided to part with his textbooks in the fourth grade, with the result that when men were being selected for the naval schools he had been left out in the cold.

Of course when "general quarters" was sounded it was Krotkikh's duty to bring up the shells to AA Gun No. 2 in the stern. But this duty was a very trifling one: all he had to do was to take from their cases the tapering shells, resembling cartridges for some giant rifle, and place them on the tray near the gun. It was the duty of another sailor—the No. 2 gunner Pinokhin—to place them in the clip of the gun, while he could only stand and watch and envy, bewailing too late the gaps in his boyhood education. During their very first encounter with dive bombers, Krotkikh realized bitterly that at his post he would never have the chance to become a Hero of the Soviet Union and that after the war the Young Communist League organization in the Zarya Altaiya Collective Farm would not have occasion to be proud of him.

It was Gun No. 2 that gave him the idea for the automatic dishwasher in the galley. Once, while washing dishes, it suddenly occurred to him that the plates could also be placed in a clip, so to speak. Then there would be no need to carry them one by one under the stream of water, scalding his hands, but, on the contrary, it would be possible to direct the stream on a number of dishes at once. He hopelessly tangled up quite a lot of wire before he got what he had dimly pictured to himself and what, as he learned later to his chagrin, had been invented long, long ago and was being used in many big restaurants. He was told this by Battalion Commissar Filatov, the Commissar of the torpedo boat, on the very first evening the latter had looked into the galley for some tea and had noticed the "automatic machine" that Krotkikh had rigged up.

This setback to his self-esteem, however, unexpectedly turned out to have a good side to it: the Commissar had had a heart-to-heart talk with him, and Krotkikh had poured out his whole soul, a mixture of dishes and the Zarya Altaiya Collective Farm and dreams about being a Hero of the Soviet Union and a certain Olya Chebykina, to whom it was simply impossible to write a letter about a war in which he was washing dishes, besides which the words crawled out onto the paper with such difficulty that even he could not make out his own scribbling afterwards. . . .

The Commissar listened to him, smiling ever so slightly as he gazed with interest at his face—the broad, high cheek-bones of a Siberian, with the clear smooth skin—and looked deep into the bright, intelligent eyes. He smiled because he recalled the time when he had entered the Navy as a League member himself, and had himself suffered when, instead of being put into some hair-raising action station, he had been set to

the uninteresting and dirty work of cleaning out the hold of a battleship that was undergoing repairs, and how he had suffered over his first letters to his friends, and how brazenly he had lied to them, describing the long cruises, the storms at sea and the streamers of his cap as they fluttered on the bridge beside the captain. Youth, so long past and beyond recall, breathed on him from those shining eyes, and he understood with all his soul that it really was absolutely impossible to write to this Olya Chebykina about dishes: she, of course, was no doubt just as given to poking fun, just as quick and sharp of tongue as had been Valya from the textile mill in his home town.

And he began to question Krotkikh with such friendly concern about the collective farm, about Olya, about how it had happened that he had left school, that the latter felt as if the man before him was not an elderly officer who had come to the ship from the reserves, not the Commissar of a torpedo boat, but a League member of his own age with whom he wanted to talk over everything and to whom he simply had to bare his whole heart. The interested and friendly eyes of the Commissar drew the words from him in a regular torrent, and if Political Officer Kozlov had not chanced to come in, the conversation would most likely have continued for a long time. The Commissar put down his glass and once again was the man Krotkikh had always been accustomed to seeing, reserved, somewhat dry.

"You're the very man I wanted to see, Comrade Political Officer," he said in his usual soft, clipped voice. "Looks like you've decided that since we're at war people have to develop and grow by themselves. No need to teach them or train them. As the saying goes, war gives birth to heroes. Spontaneously. Is that it?"

"I don't understand, Comrade Battalion Commissar," replied Kozlov, foreseeing unpleasantness.

"What is there here that you can't understand. . . . Thank you, Comrade Krotkikh, I don't want any more tea, you may go. . . ."

Krotkikh quickly picked up the glass and the can of condensed milk (lest the Commissar take it into his head to treat Kozlov with it), but on going out he lingered for a moment on the other side of the door: the conversation seemed to be about him. The Commissar wanted to know whether the Political Officer was aware of the fact that Andrei Krotkikh, able-bodied seaman of his unit, was rather shaky in his general education and that it was impossible for him to get ahead. Further, he asked whether it could really be that there were no League members on board who had been to the university before being called up, and then himself named the chemist Sukhov, who had been attending a teachers' college. Kozlov replied that Sukhov was very active in the League, and so overloaded with all sorts of assignments, such as the ship newspaper, the Y.C.L. Bureau and lectures, that he simply hadn't the time. The Commissar grew very angry. Krotkikh knew this by the sudden silence that ensued: when the Commissar was angry he usually fell silent and slowly rolled a cigarette, looking at the person with whom he was talking and then immediately turning away, as if waiting for his rage to subside. The silence continued. Then there was the click of a cigarette lighter, and the Commissar said softly:

"I believe it's you who haven't the time to think, Comrade Political Officer. Why have you loaded everything onto Sukhov? No one else around, eh? The trouble is you're blind to the people around you, just as you've been blind to this lad. See to it that you arrange something with regard to his studies, yes, and step into the galley occasionally: take an interest in what's going on in his mind. . . ."

From that evening perspectives opened up before Andrei Krotkikh. The war continued as ever. There were skirmishes, storms, cruises, gunfire at night and raids by dive bombers during the day. The automatic AA gun greedily swallowed the shells fed into its insatiable maw. Krotkikh dragged them to the gun and washed dishes—but all this was thrown into the shade by the future: before him was the spring, when he would be going to the Artillery School. He manœuvred so as not to lose a minute of time. While squirting the hose on the dishes he would hold a grammar book in his other hand. While polishing the brass in the saloon, he would recite the multiplication tables to himself. While standing in readiness, at the shells, he solved problems in his notebook. The notebook had been given him by the Commissar. Everything had been given him by the Commissar—the notebook, his lessons, and his future.

And the heart of the nineteen-year-old sailor was filled with a strong and unwavering love for this calm, elderly man.

He was happy when he saw that the Commissar was in a good mood, when he joked on deck or in the Saloon during meals. He moped when he saw that the Commissar was tired and preoccupied. He hated those who made the Commissar fall silent and slowly busy himself with rolling a cigarette. At such times rage would mount in a hot wave in his heart, and once it even flooded over into an offence which in its turn made the Commissar fall silent and roll a cigarette.

The night was fraught with alarm. The Black Sea gleamed under the cold winter moon. There was only a slight wind and the ship was not rolling, but it was bitterly cold on deck. The torpedo boat was not far from the enemy and at any moment the clear white sky might rain down bombs on the vessel, which made a distinct target against the path of moonlight on the water. The anti-aircraft gunners had orders to remain at their posts all night.

The Commissar came down from the bridge and made the rounds of the guns. He looked as if he were chilled to the marrow. When he came to Gun No. 2 in the stern he suddenly stretched out his arms and began to do some setting-up exercises.

"I advise you to do the same," he said to the sailors. "It makes your blood circulate."

Krotkikh went up to him and asked leave to go below: he would heat up some tea and bring it to the Commander and Commissar on the bridge. Filatov smiled.

"Thanks, Andryusha," he said addressing him as he always did in their long informal chats, "thanks, lad. But I don't feel like tea. Besides you won't be able to warm up everybody, they're also frozen."

He turned to the gun and began to joke, glancing around in his usual

way to see whether all the members of the crew were at their posts. The gun layers were in their seats, faces up, scanning the hazy moonlit sky. The other numbers were squatting on their haunches, ready to jump up and take their places at the gun. The gun commander, Petty Officer Gushchev, was standing there wearing his telephone headset, looking like a deep sea diver in the tangle of pipes and hoses. The gun was in readiness to fire at the twinkling of an eye. But suddenly the Commissar stopped joking and frowned.

"And where is No. 2? What's the meaning of this, Comrade Gushchev?"

Gushchev reported that he had given Pinokhin leave to go below for a few minutes. The Commissar looked at his watch and fell silent. A long, silent five minutes passed and he raised his eyes to Gushchev. In an undertone the latter ordered Krotkikh to look for Pinokhin in the head gallery and to tell him to make it snappy.

Pinokhin was not there. As he had suspected, Krotkikh found him on the forecastle deck. Pinokhin had stretched himself out on the locker near the alarm gong and was sleeping peacefully, apparently having decided that in the event of a call to action the gong would rouse him and he would manage to get to the gun on time.

Krotkikh looked down at him; rage and resentment on behalf of the Commissar seethed in his heart. He recalled how the Commissar had tried to warm himself by doing exercises, how he had refused a cup of tea, how he was standing there now in the cold, silent and waiting—and suddenly gritting his teeth he swung out and punched Pinokhin. . . .

This whole affair was gone into after the torpedo boat had carried out its mission. The Commissar had been silent and had rolled a cigarette—rolled it because of him, because of Krotkikh, and this was beyond bearing. Life seemed to have come to an end: now the Commissar would never again call him Andryusha, never again ask him how much nine times nine was, never again smile and say: "Well, then, cadet. . . ." Tears welled up to his eyes and apparently the Commissar realized that they were ready to fall from under his lowered lids. He put down his cigarette and began to talk.

His words were slow and biting. Somehow Filatov turned everything inside out. He began by saying that if any other Commissar had been in his place Krotkikh would not have taken Pinokhin's behaviour so much to heart. Further, he said that he had long noticed how devoted and loyal Krotkikh was to him, but that all this was not quite the thing. It seemed that the Commissar had noticed one night how Krotkikh had tiptoed up to him, closed the porthole, fixed his blanket and gazed at him for a long time smiling. He called all this childishness and in no way becoming to a seaman in the Red Navy. If Krotkikh had struck Pinokhin because the latter had abandoned his post, thereby injuring the whole ship and in actual fact betraying his country, then the Commissar might have understood it more or less. But Krotkikh had acted from entirely different motives, as he himself had admitted when he had shouted that his heart was burning for the Commissar, that a man like him was freezing on deck while that skunk was snoring away in the warmth. . . .

Everything he said was true: Krotkikh had not even given a thought to the fact that Pinokhin was interested only in himself and was a deserter.



The Commissar spoke sharply, and Krotkikh suffered the tortures of the damned. Evidently the Commissar noticed this, because at long last he lit the cigarette that he had rolled, and Krotkikh, who knew his habits, realized that he was no longer angry. But Filatov exhaled the smoke and unexpectedly concluded:

"It goes without saying that you will have to be punished. Your case will be taken up by the League as well. And you will have to be transferred."

Everything swam in front of Krotkikh's eyes.

"Comrade Battalion Commissar . . . I couldn't stand it on another ship," he said in a choked voice, and suddenly the Commissar softened.

"Now, then, I'm not sending you away from here. Where would you find another Sukhov? Why, all your studying would be done for. . . . You are to be transferred to the general mess. Take your automatic dish-washer with you—you'll need it. I guess that'll be all right now, won't it?"

And although in his heart of hearts Krotkikh considered that it was not at all right, that the Commissar did not understand his love and devotion, that his whole life was now clouded over and that to go over to the general mess was really hard lines, nevertheless he drew himself up smartly and replied:

"Aye, aye, Comrade Battalion Commissar."

It was a real tragedy to him. To cap everything, Krotkikh had never known that besides love there was also such a thing as jealousy in this world. Now for the first time he experienced that bitter and resentful feeling.

He could not help thinking that someone else was concerning himself about the Commissar now, that someone else was listening to his jokes at mess, that the Commissar was having heart-to-heart talks with someone else as he sipped his tea and condensed milk. And the new orderly would, of course, never think of hiding the can of condensed milk from visitors and would never be able to serve the Commissar during a storm as he used to. . . .

In this sorrow of his, this jealousy and remorse, Krotkikh matured. He became more serious, reserved, and, involuntarily imitating Filatov, kept quiet when anger or offence dictated immediate action. Of course he didn't roll a cigarette: you couldn't smoke everywhere. But he taught himself on these occasions to wriggle his fingers, one by one, which could be managed even when he had to hold his arms stiffly at his sides.

He saw Filatov now much more rarely than before: at official meetings or when the Commissar came to talk to the men on the lower deck. He always tried to get into the crowd of men around the Commissar, but Filatov spoke to him as he did to all the others and his eyes never once glowed with the warmth and lively interest to which Krotkikh had become accustomed and which he missed so much now. And little by little, Filatov, the man who was so near and dear to him, was replaced in his mind by Filatov, the ship's Commissar. And strangely enough it was then that Filatov fully entered his heart.

This was no longer that childish, confused and touching but foolish love with which he had burned previously. This was something new, the profound love that binds comrades at war.

The Black Sea was up to its old alarming habits, and the ship dived into

the waves like a submarine, while the whole deck was awash with the icy waters. On the forecastle deck there was hot coffee, a peg of vodka and dry felt boots, while the watch was changed every hour—and Krotkikh realized that this was the Commissar's doing. At the small base where they had put in for repairs after the storm, a cart had come up to the gangway with eight sheep, two guitars, tangerines and cabbages. The men in the shaggy fur caps had asked in broken Russian how they could hand over this little gift to the sailors about whom the Commissar had spoken to them the day before at their collective farm. In every big and small event in the life on board ship, in battle and in storm, in the work of machine and gun, everywhere Krotkikh felt the Commissar—his thought, his will, his solicitude.

There came a troublous day in that strange southern winter, when the sun warms while the wind is cold, in which everyone on the vessel walked around silently and gloomily all the morning: news had come that the Germans had captured Rostov. Distressed and alarmed thoughts flew to the Caucasus, to the oil, to the disrupted railway line. The men did not speak to one another, each thinking his own thoughts, while work made almost no headway. But later heads began to rise, eyes to sparkle with hope and hate, hands to work furiously and swiftly. Now everyone spoke about Moscow, about the push that Stalin was planning, and that would be launched at any moment now—and Rostov took its place in the huge scheme of the war, while Krotkikh realized with pride that it was the Commissar who had told the men about this.

Krotkikh began to understand just what the ship's Commissar meant and why the sailors spoke of him with respect and affection although they knew him little privately, off-duty. He began to understand why every one of them was ready to risk his life in battle for Filatov, not only as a splendid, honest, responsive person but as the Commissar, a Party man and the life and soul of the vessel.

As ever, Krotkikh stood at his case of shells, placing them beside the gun, no farther. But his childish envy of the No. 2 gunner (now no longer Pinokhin, who had been handed over for court martial, but Trofimov) had ceased to worry him, just as the knowledge that he would perform no great feats of valour here had also ceased to be a source of mental agony. He now had an entirely new conception of the ship. He admired her as such, admired her strength and her men, her steel and her commanders, her motion and her name. Even the dishes which he had loathed and despised so greatly not very long ago had ceased to distress him.

This new attitude towards the ship as a living, strong and affectionate friend took such a grip on his imagination that one evening he sat down to write his first letter to Olya Chebykina.

But nothing came of his efforts. The writing was now clear enough and easy to read, but he could in no way convey his amazing feeling about the ship and his love for her. He wrote a whole page of trite, inexpressive words and tore up the letter in a rage, even forgetting to wriggle his fingers. For two days he walked about moodily, searching for the words he needed to write about the ship, but the ship herself distracted his thoughts.

They were making ready to send out a landing party to participate in a

raid on the enemy. At the League meeting everyone had volunteered. But only fifteen men were needed from the torpedo boat, and these had to be good at handling tommy guns, bayonets and mortars. Krotkikh did not answer these requirements at all, and the Commander did not even look his way. Krotkikh wriggled his fingers and was silent.

But at dawn, when the torpedo boat reached the spot where the landing was to be made and when the landing party came up on deck with their arms, and the case of bombs for the mortar was set down beside his case of shells in readiness to be loaded on the ship's boat, his whole soul yearned with longing. The mortar bombs lay in the case in even rows, fat-bellied and familiar; he was expert at taking them out of the case and carrying them over to the mortar, better than anyone else. . . . But just then the destroyer veered sharply, the commander of Gun No. 2 blew his whistle: aircraft had appeared overhead and had to be driven off.

The AA gun barked fitfully and accurately, but something was rattling down on the deck like dry peas. Trofimov fell, dropping the shell, and the AA gun ceased firing. The dive bomber had fired a burst from its machine gun. Krotkikh dashed up to the gun, and quickly bending over the shells that he himself had laid out in readiness, fed the ravenous clip. Once again the gun set to work. Every bit of Krotkikh's attention was concentrated on taking new shells from the case and getting them to the clip quickly, so that he had absolutely no time whatever to reflect on the fact that, at last, he, Krotkikh, was actually fighting himself. Something whistled past the gun, and a huge column of water and smoke rose into the air. Right after the bomb, the screaming and roaring plane nose-dived into this same choppy water. Krotkikh noticed only the tail with the black cross and realized that they had brought down the German that had been so brazenly diving over the destroyer. But before he could feel delight or surprise, someone behind him shouted:

"The mortar bombs!"

He wheeled round. The case with the bombs was on fire. At any moment the bombs would begin to explode. He saw someone's figure slit through the smoke, someone's hands trying to lift the case and then the sailor (who it was he could not make out) sheering off. Gushchev waved his hand despairingly, tore off the telephone headset and shouted:

"Clear the stern!"

Any second now, two dozen bombs, one of which would suffice to wipe out the whole gun crew, would blow up. It suddenly flashed through Krotkikh's mind that after the mortar bombs, his shells would also begin to explode in the fire, and after them the magazine and the whole ship—and he made a step towards the case. But just then Gun No. 4 thundered from the aft turret, and it seemed to him that it was the death flaming in the case which had exploded. This so terrified him that he turned from the stern to run after the others. That step towards the case had left him behind the rest, and despair gripped him: if he stumbled, there would be no one to help him. Real, panic terror paralysed him. He made an effort to step forward, when suddenly, far ahead of him, near the bridge, he caught sight of the Commissar.

Filatov was pushing his way through the men who were rushing in the opposite direction and was running towards the stern. And Krotkikh realized why. He was thunderstruck at what he saw. In two leaps he was back at the case and had pried it up from underneath, burning the palms of his hands. But the case was too heavy for one man to lift. Someone was running to his assistance. But that "someone" was the ship's Commissar, and it was impossible to let him come near the case.

Krotkikh crouched down and seized the red-hot stabilizer of the nearest bomb. It seared the palm of his hand, and for a moment the agonizing pain wrung his heart, but the bomb flew overboard. And then another. . . .

It is possible that he shouted something. As his comrades related afterwards, he had hopped about like a frog beside the case, dancing some kind of ghastly dance of pain and cursing senselessly and horribly at the top of his voice. But the bombs flew overboard one after the other, rapidly emptying the burning case. Straightening out with the next bomb in his hands, he saw the Commissar. The latter was already at the stern bridge, alongside death. In a flash Krotkikh crouched down again and raised the half-emptied case. The flames lapped his face. His jacket caught fire. Turning his face aside, he heaved the case overboard with a mighty effort. Then he began to beat at his burning jacket, no longer feeling the pain in his seared palms.

At this point someone grasped him firmly around the shoulders. He turned his head. It was the Commissar.

"It's all right, Comrade Commissar, it's out already," he said, thinking that the Commissar was trying to extinguish his burning jacket.

But glancing into the Commissar's eyes he realized that this was an embrace.





REPELLING AN AIR ATTACK

*Pencil Drawing by Vladimir Sokolov*



THE MEN OF SEVASTOPOL

*Oil Painting by Alexander Deineka*

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PYOTR PAVLENKO

GRIGORI SULUKHIA

**H**

He had been wounded at daybreak. The steppe looked as smooth as a table. There was nowhere to hide. The thought that a mine might kill him or tanks crush him tortured Grigori. He tried to find some hollow where he could take cover, but lost consciousness before coming across such a place. When he came to, the steppe had changed miraculously.

"I must have been crawling while unconscious," he thought. He rose to his feet, gritting his teeth with the pain, stared at his bloodstained greatcoat, sensing with every nerve in his body the heavy, ponderous weight that was his chest. He took a few steps without knowing where he was going, came to a little mound and stopped short, staggering. He lacked the strength to step over this tiny lump of earth. Knowing that he would fall at any moment, he sank to the ground deliberately, slowly, cautiously. Breathing heavily he crawled on.

The steppe actually heaved. That morning, when he had dashed into the attack, he hadn't so much as glanced underfoot, the ground had been so level. But now, as he lay stretched out, hollows and mounds seemed to surge and swell like gleaming green waves in the fresh breeze. The ambulance orderlies searching for the wounded might not find him. It worried him. He crawled on for a few metres, and suddenly he noticed a German not far off. Beside him lay a steel helmet, turned upwards like a cup. The dead man's hand lay in it as if it wanted to dip up some water. Sulukhia gasped.

"I haven't crawled anywhere!" he thought with horror. "I've been lying in one spot the whole time. I killed that German myself at dawn. I ran him through with my bayonet and saw how he snatched off his helmet as he fell, dropping it beside him and putting his hand in."

Sulukhia buried his face in the ground. The sharp little blades of glistening grass reminded him of the fur of a young animal. The subtle odour

of wormwood rose from the ground. His chest ached. Now when all hope of rescue was gone his chest had begun to ache as if it had waited for this moment.

How the battle had ended and where his company was now, Sulukhia did not know. There was a mist before his eyes and he could not see far, while the din of the firing which crept along the whole horizon deafened him. He made another attempt to crawl on. . . .

Pain flooded him. It was as if his very blood, his very breath ached and gnawed at him. He was afraid of making a sudden movement and thus bringing on fresh agonies. Giving himself up to pain utterly, it swamped him. But after torturing him till he could not see straight, to the point of delirium, after racking his nerves so that everything quivered within him, weakening his muscles to impotence, pain could do no more. And Sulukhia became accustomed to it, sensed that there was some corner in his being which stood above pain, and that with this strong, healthy part he could think and reason. He had to make haste. There was so much to think of, and there might not be enough time.

The first thought that came to him was that he—Grigori Sulukhia—was dying without having done anything worth dying for. Well, he had advanced to the attack, fired at the Germans, even killed one. What a feat!

"I should have died three years ago during the flood," he thought, enraged with himself. "I swear to God I could have saved two people then. Or when there was that fire in Poti on the tramp steamer and valuable freight had to be salvaged, that was another good chance. I could have done a lot, but I fuked it. If I had died then, there would have been some point to it. But I fuked it—and now death has come, and all for nothing."

The thought that twice he could have died with glory and had been frightened, thus spurning fame, and that now he was dying in utter obscurity, angered and grieved him. He was a Mingrelian, a man of fiery temperament. It is said of the Mingrelians that they are like a loaded gun with a damaged safety catch: you never can tell when and how such a gun might go off. Anger proved stronger than pain! It even made him giddy. With a blood-stained hand he tried to wrench out a tuft of grass as if it were hair. But the grass was so short that he could not grasp it properly. Yes, death was taking Grigori Sulukhia unawares. For no reason at all it was claiming him from life, for nothing, as if he were a silly lamb. It was a pity, for there was no putting matters to rights any more.

He recalled Zugdidi, his happy home, his old mother. She had been such a songster that she herself used to say: "If only there were enough time, I have enough songs to last two hundred years!" But when she'd grown older she'd become shy of singing, and kept begging her son to sing for her. "When I don't sing, my head aches," she would say to her family.

The Mingrelians are born songsters, like the birds. His mother was not exaggerating. A Mingrelian goes to sleep with a song on his lips and wakes to sing again. "And now," thought Grigori, "it's neither glory nor song that mother will get from me. . . . What can you sing of me? What have I done?"



Thus he would have continued to rage at himself for a long time yet, would have tortured himself for the glory he had let slip, but that his ear caught the sound of footsteps. He cast aside all thought and pulled his rifle closer.

The three German soldiers had already passed Grigori when they heard the click of a lock. With a cry of fright they flung themselves flat on the ground. No shots followed. Thereupon they crawled over to Sulukhia, and seeing that he could not stand on his feet, dragged him along by his arms. He lost consciousness and did not suffer all the tortures of this agonizing journey. He came to when they were already in the German-occupied village. This was the village that Grigori Sulukhia was to have captured at dawn.

Someone who spoke in broken Russian had thrown a pail of water over Sulukhia and as if this should have brought the wounded man to his senses immediately, began questioning him as to what unit he was from, where it was and what its strength was.

The return of consciousness brought back with it also the mood in which he had been until the appearance of the three Germans—a mood of absolute fury with himself.

He was in a towering passion. He trembled, his teeth chattered and his eyes looked daggers.

"Can you hear what I'm asking you," said the German.

"Of course I hear. I'm not deaf!"

"Then answer!"

"Why should I answer? It's my business—if I want to I will, if I don't I won't!" retorted Sulukhia.

Lean, slight, incredibly mercurial, as are all Mingrelians, who are more difficult to catch than a sunbeam, he lay on the ground in front of the German, propping himself up on an elbow and glaring up at him unblinkingly with fiery eyes. Even in peacetime he had never tolerated being spoken to in this way, much less could he stand it from this German.

"It'll be too bad for you, if you don't talk," warned the German.

"Too bad for whom? For me? Don't provoke me, I tell you. . . . You bastard, it'll be just too bad for you, not me. Do you hear? Our men are coming."

One of the soldiers swung out at Grigori's right arm like a sledge hammer and then twisted it.

"You bastard! Who're you trying to scare? Give me a gun and then you'll see what's what! I'd spit in your face!"

"But you're a Georgian, you're no Russian," said the German. "Tell us what we want to know and we won't hurt you. We'll send you to the hospital. We respect the Georgians."

"I can't tell you anything. I can only show you," Sulukhia replied passionately, gesturing with his sound left hand. The face of the German grew purple at the insult.

"Did you get that? No? That's all the information you'll get out of me!"

At this point a couple of German soldiers pounced on the prisoner. They broke his right arm, and tearing off his greatcoat, tunic and under-

wear, set to work carving a five-pointed star on his back. If such pain had been inflicted upon him for the first time he might have moaned or even screamed, but he had become accustomed to pain from early morning, and rage helped him to bear it even when he weakened. Strips of skin were ripped off his back. The Germans asked again whether he would talk.

"What shall I say? You're a bastard, that's what I'll say! Who're you scaring? . . . Think I don't know anything? Think if you say you respect a Georgian I'll respect you too? We're people. But you. . . . A jackal and a rat gave birth to you. You, a human being?! A baboon's backside is better looking than your mug! Oh, you misbegotten toad! If only I had the strength, your eyes would fly out of your head!"

Sulukhia spat, and turning his head, looked off at the village. The limestone houses with their dirt roofs thickly overgrown with grass had been so badly ruined they looked like ancient excavations that had just been unearthed. A few terrified villagers huddled near the houses. On the street lay the mangled remains of tanks, a cow's horn, a soldier's torn boot. The sun was sinking over the scorched steppe. Silent birds were wheeling over the sole surviving tree in the village as noiselessly as bats. Evening was drawing near.

"Oh, mother, now sing about me!" whispered Grigori feelingly.

He recalled a certain serene evening at home when his mother had walked over to the tree which threw its flickering shadow on their yard, and had begun to sing an ancient, long-forgotten and hence wholly new song in her rough old voice.

"Mother, now sing about me. . . ."

"Thought it over? Did you say something?" asked the German.

"Don't bother me, lout!" replied Sulukhia almost calmly.

Everything brutal and excruciating that these scoundrels could do to him they had already done. But he, Grigori Sulukhia, Red Armyman, twenty-six years old, from Zugdidi (even the birds flew there to learn how to sing), had also played his part—he had remained firm. And now he wanted to be alone, to remember his past.

"Asiatic! You want to die in peace, do you? I won't let you!" shrieked the furious German.

But Sulukhia was not the kind of man to let himself be screamed at, especially now, just before his death.

"And what are you," he shouted, interrupting the German. "We won't let you get to Asia, we'll kick you out of Europe, and then what'll you be? You're only scaring yourself with all your yelling! Leave me alone, I say!"

"Throw him into the fire! Into the fire with him, the scum!" ordered the German.

The bonfire, over which the soldiers were heating up their canned food, had almost burned out when Grigori was flung onto the glowing embers. Straw was added to the fire.

"You still have five minutes," said the German, bending over the blackening, all-enduring and already indifferent body of Sulukhia.

The quiet evening painted the steppe with its violet-blue shadows. But from the East the thunderous roar of battle was advancing menacingly on this stillness. It bespoke a night of storm.

The damp straw smouldered but did not flare up. The German touched a cigarette lighter to the straw, and the flames crackled and hissed as they danced along it.

The villagers who saw the horrible death of Grigori Sulukhia tell how he cried out, as if in his sleep, as soon as the flames reached his face, how he tried to raise himself on his broken arms, to get out of the fire. And then they had heard his last, long-drawn-out, slowly rising shriek. It was like a song—a shriek-song. Perhaps he was calling: “Oh, Georgia, mother, now sing about me!”

Or perhaps, bidding farewell to Zugdidi, it was to his old mother that he called: “Mother, now sing about me!”

Or perhaps, hearing the fiery thunder of the nearby battle, he had called on his comrades, who were already breaking into the village: “Brothers, Mother Georgia, now sing about me!”

And that was all. Without a groan, without a shudder, he died, just as if he had dropped from the heights like a bird who had died in mid-air.

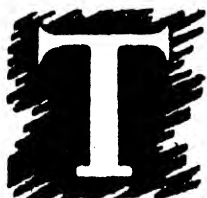
The village was captured late that evening. The fire was still glowing and the charred corpse of Sulukhia still retained the blackish, blood-red star between the shoulder blades.



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ILYA EHRENBURG

## THE SOUL OF RUSSIA



WO years ago I wrote: "We must set our jaws still more tightly. The Germans are in Kiev. This thought feeds our hatred. We shall pay them back, in full measure, so that their children's children will shiver with superstitious dread at the mere sound of the word 'Kiev.' We shall free Kiev. The blood of the enemy will wash out the traces of the enemy. Like the phoenix of old, Kiev shall rise again from the ashes."

Long and bitter months passed. The Germans advanced still deeper into Russia. They reached Nalchik, Elista, Stalingrad. Military observers of various countries speculated as to where the conquerors would go next, to Iraq or to India. A hotel owner in Bad-Kissingen sent out announcements about the sanatorium he was about to open in Borzhom. In Kassel courses were given to train Sonderführers for Bashkiria. The financial sections of German newspapers stated that "the Azov works of F. Krupp" would be operating by 1945 and gladden the hearts of shareholders. In those days a great civil grief lay on our hearts like a stone. Amidst the salutes of victory we do not forget what we have lived through, nor shall we forget it. For us this experience is both grief and wisdom and the key to spiritual courage.

During the nights radio waves surge over the earth—long, medium, short. They have long forgotten their twittering of peaceful days. Now they beat like a pulse; over and over they carry the very same words: counter-attack, pockets of resistance, lateral roads, crossings. Now in forty languages they are speaking about one and the same thing: the Germans are retreating. Military observers make no further mention of Iraq. Their eyes are fixed on the Dniester, the Bug, the Niemen. The Sonderführers who were trained to strike fear into the hearts of the Bashkirs are enrolled in route battalions. The Mariupol shares have become worthless scraps of paper. The hotel owner in Bad-Kissingen has taken complete leave of his senses and

shouts at his wife: "You'll see, they'll come here. . . ." Over the southern steppes German divisions are fleeing. The phoenix Kiev has risen from the ashes. Hitler is trying to console the Germans: "The enemy is more than a thousand kilometres from the German border." His calculations are faulty: it is much less from Vitebsk to Eastern Prussia. Hitler is shrieking: "My nerves will stand it." But matters are coming to a head now, and Hitler's neck will not be able to stand it.

How did all this come about, asks an astonished world.

We ourselves were in the very thick of events, we lived from communique to communique, we fought and worked, we had no time to meditate. We know now how the 6th German Army was surrounded. We know what the German offensive on Kursk ended in. We know that we are routing the recent conquerors. But still we did not ponder over the question of how all this happened. We know that we have pulled through. We know that before us are the green shores of victory. But let us endeavour for a moment to stand aside, to look at ourselves with the eyes of history.

We frequently speak and write about the weakening of the German army. We know that Hitler's reserves are waning, that bomber aircraft are working havoc in his rear, that the two years of the fierce fighting in Russia have broken the back of his infantry. We know also that there are no genuine ideals in the German army of marauders and chicken snatchers, that discipline alone cannot replace spiritual ardour when things are hard, that the German soldier has grown weaker spiritually and that he is ripe for destruction. But then is it all a question of the Germans alone? Let us think of something else, of the growing might of our army.

The war is as labyrinthian, dark and dense as an impenetrable forest. It does not resemble the descriptions that are made of it—it is both simpler and more complicated. It is felt but not always understood by those who take part in it. It is understood but not felt by its latest analysers. Very probably the historian who has quite correctly appraised the full import of the forcing of the Dnieper pictures this crossing differently from what it was in reality, involuntarily bringing it into some kind of order. He smartens up the men, shaves the exhausted sergeants, brushes the dust from the officers' tunics. He most likely does not see the men around the campfire dreaming hazily about their homes and remarking that the cook keeps harping on mush and that it would be a good idea to bake some potatoes. The future generation will be even less able to imagine that it was these men who pushed across to the right bank of one of the widest rivers in Europe without pontoons. As for those who took part in the war, they know what war looks like. They know that four hundred kilometres, fighting every inch of the way, is no parade. They know that not only companies, battalions and regiments fight, but people with varying biographies, warm as a ball of wool, that each soldier is bound to his country by a separate thread. But it is not easy for those who participate in the war to grasp the historical significance of what is taking place. The great emotions of the given day are enough for them.

People of other countries frequently wonder how it is that our country held out in the tragic days of '41 and '42. Everyone knows how strong the

German army was, how thoroughly Germany prepared for its predatory onslaught. The fate of France, with its military traditions and the indisputable courage of its freedom-loving and militant population, is remembered by all. Hitler enslaved Europe. Not the British Isles, of course. But we were not separated from Germany by a sea, nor did we have mountains. We stemmed the aggressors with our breasts, and now these people of other countries are disputing wherein the secret lies. Some say in the nature of Russian courage, in the traditional stamina of the Russian soldier, in the size and natural wealth of Russia, in the fact that Russia has never been conquered. Others object that times have changed. Bayonets, even those of the Russians, are impotent against "Tigers." In an epoch of motive power, space alone cannot save a people. They say that if Russia held out it is thanks to its structure, to the extraordinary patriotism of its peoples, to the fact that every citizen takes a vital interest in the fate of the state. They add to the word "Russia" another word, "Soviet."

Both are right. In the first years after the October Revolution, the Revolution seemed to us all important, frequently overshadowing history. In the course of the war the past arose and joined hands with the present and the future. We fully grasped the organic connection between Russia and the October Revolution. We realized that the Revolution had twice saved Russia: in 1917 and in 1941. If not for the Revolution, Russia might have lost her sovereign independence, might have betrayed her historical mission. But it was not by chance that the October Revolution was born in Russia. It sprang from all the aspirations of the Russian people. Its importance goes beyond state boundaries, and it is with good reason that it is called the greatest event of the twentieth century, but its roots go down deep into Russian history and it cannot be separated from the Russian character, even from the Russian landscape.

The men around the campfire on the right bank of the Dnieper are, of course, the sons of the Russian soldiers of ancient times. They have retained the love for their native land, the valour, the pluck and the staying power of their forefathers. But there is also something new in them, something born of the Revolution: they are not only soldiers, they are citizens.

Before me I have a confidential report of Lieutenant General Dettling, commander of a Sudeten division. This memorandum is headed: "Sentiments of the Local Population." Here is what the German general writes:

"The overwhelming majority of the population does not believe that the Germans will be victorious. . . . In some populated places attempts have been noticed on the part of many local inhabitants to establish contact with adherents of the Soviet system who have remained. . . . The young people of both sexes who have received an education are almost without exception pro-Soviet minded. They have a sceptical attitude towards our propaganda. These young people with a seven-year school education or higher ask questions after lectures that enable one to judge of their high mental level. As a blind they usually try to make out that they are simpletons. It is extremely difficult to influence them. They read any Soviet literature which is still around. This youth loves Russia above all else, and fears that Germany will convert their country into a German colony. . . . With the inception of Ger-

man occupation the young people feel that they are deprived of a future. They are always pointing out that in the Soviet Union things were very good for the youth, since everything possible was done for them and they were ensured of a great future."

Lieutenant General Dettling would scarcely have drawn up such a memorandum in 1916. Patriotism existed then as well. Valour also existed before. But the young men and women, the peasants of the Smolensk Gubernia in the time of the Tsar, in the time of the estate system and castes, could not dream of a "great future." A certain Napoleonic officer called a partisan of 1812 "the confused soul of the Russian soil." It was not reason but their hearts that showed the serfs of that period the correct path, and they went after the aggressors with pitchforks. Their feats have been justified by history. The descendants of these serfs have become the masters of one of the greatest powers in the world. And the heroes of the *Molodaya Gvardia* (Young Guard) were led not by instinct but by the light of reason. They looked down on the German officers. Oleg Koshevoy knew that he was a representative of a lofty human society which was fighting against armed beasts. Such is the part played by the October Revolution.

The Soviet Union is being defended not only as a great state, but as a genuine democracy. The war is being waged by the people, to whom the state is as their own hearth and home. I have seen no few German generals. I think it is possible to recognize them even in a bathhouse. They are a caste, just like the caste of Krupp factory owners, or the Junkers of Eastern Prussia. Such generals are bred, they are a race within the Aryan race. Who is it that is thrashing them? At Kiev Lieutenant General Dettling was routed by Lieutenant General Chenyakhovsky. The latter is thirty-six years old. He is the son of a railway clerk from Uman. Ever since childhood he has been burrowing into science as into rock. He is a man of tremendous culture, and what distinguishes him is his mind, his knowledge and his talent, not caste. He is only one of the many generals of a free and democratic state. I can think of colonels who at the beginning of the war were lieutenants; teachers, agronomists and mechanics on whose chests I saw the Suvorov Order. We may say that the German army is now being routed by an army enriched by military experience and led by capable officers, and we may also say that the Germans are being routed by a people who twenty-six years ago took the reins of their country into their own hands.

Everyone knows that one of the reasons for our victories is the extraordinary work of our war industry. Let us recall all the difficulties. Stalin-grad, Kharkov, Dniepropetrovsk, Voronezh, Rostov and the Donbas were occupied by the enemy. Factories sprang up in the midst of wasteland. The steppes of Eastern Russia are not Detroit. Our workers bore all the deprivations, went without sufficient food, without enough sleep, but they gave the army tanks, aircraft, arms. The factories were born overnight, but the workers were not born overnight. They are the people created by the Soviet State, they are not the slaves of Krupp. They are creators, and it was their creative spirit that helped them in the terrible months.

What explains the fact that the Armenian Petrosyan, who was caught by the Germans, found in himself the strength despite the ebbing of his life-

blood to vanquish his would-be executioners and make his way back to his own lines? What helped the Georgian Gakhokidze wipe out the enemy on the last patch of Sevastopol soil? Why is it that the Uzbek Kayum Rakhmanov did not grudge his life in defence of Leningrad? Why did the Jew Papernik give his life at the approaches to Moscow? There was such a thing as the October Revolution. In its purifying flames was born a new Russia, a mother to all the peoples. Yesterday's "aliens" became citizens, state builders, and when the Germans attacked their native land they went into battle, all speaking in different tongues, all different in appearance, but all with the same emotion in their hearts.

I do not wish to say that before the war we achieved everything. In a certain Chasidic legend the wise man is asked: "What is heaven like?" And the wise man replied: "Every man creates his own heaven." A quarter of a century is but a brief hour for history. There is much that we did not manage to do as yet. In our society were not only all our best aspirations but also our shortcomings. In the course of the war we changed a great deal as we went along. We saw that we frequently lacked sufficient discipline, organization, personal initiative and sense of personal responsibility. We realized that our children need stronger moral foundations, that they must be more deeply imbued with the spirit of human dignity, patriotism, loyalty, chivalry, respect for old age and solicitude for the weak. But having realized our shortcomings, we saw in the fire of trials how lofty was our life, built as it was on equality and labour. The war has not only brought devastation to our country, it has steeled people and elevated them spiritually. When they return to peacetime labour, they will not forget what they have thought over and felt. They will bring the wisdom and heroics of the war years into their everyday life. They will help to create that heaven which will reflect the thoughts and sentiments of the much-tried Soviet people.

Labour and life will be made easier to us by the historical perspective that has now become the property of all. Without renouncing the ideals of the future, we have learned at the same time to derive strength from the past. We have grasped the full significance of the heritage left us by our forefathers. We have no desire either to renounce the past without discrimination or to accept it as something infallible. It is possible to receive as a heritage a house or a barren lot, a fortune or a debt. We shall learn from the military genius of Suvorov but not from the sovereign conceit of Paul. The German fascists are fond of speaking about traditions. But what have they taken from the past of the German people? Schiller's love of liberty? Goethe's wisdom? No, the tortures of the Nuremberg hangmen, the superstitious rigmarole of alchemists, the atrocities of the savage Huns and the barrack drill discipline of Friedrich's feldwebels. Every nation takes from its past whatever accords with its spiritual level, its life, its ideals. For us the past means Pushkin and not Benkendorf, Kutuzov and not Arakcheyev, the Decembrists and not Saltychikha, Plekhanov and Gorky and not Purishkevich and the shopkeepers of Okhotny Ryad. The October Revolution has helped us to understand the history of Russia, to make of the distant past a source of inspiration.



The victories of the Red Army already enable us to make out in the dim haze before the dawn the outlines of the great celebration of victory, of which the head of our state spoke to us even in the gravest hours.

What will the world be like after the war? This thought is already beginning to occur to us in the rare minutes of respite between battles, marches and war work. The fascists have wrought so much evil against us and all of Europe, have caused such devastation, so much suffering, that it sometimes plunges one's heart into the slough of despond. We see that schools, nurseries, museums, bright spacious residential houses, all built by our generation with such effort, have been burned to the ground. We see cows replacing the tractors stolen by the Germans. We see how our cherished ideals of brotherhood, human dignity, and liberty have been flouted, see letters from the slaves in Germany, the photographs of German atrocities, the savagery of the dark ages. The imagination easily continues the picture: the desert zone includes Paris, the vineyards of Greece, the lovely villages of Denmark, the factories of Belgium—all Europe. Everywhere are the same ashes in which the earth has clothed itself, the weeds, which our peasants call the "German harvest," torture, the humiliation of man, the flouting of reason, justice, humaneness. How can the earth rise from the dead? And sometimes the thought creeps into the heart of the low-spirited: has not the barbarism of fascism thrown humanity far back?

I do not wish to gloss over anything. I know how difficult it will be to rehabilitate both the ruined cities and the spiritual equilibrium of the people who have spent years under the rule of monsters. And yet I look ahead boldly to the future. Right will conquer on the field of battle. It will conquer also on the scaffolds of human construction. We have learned to value liberty even more dearly after the despotism of the Hitlerites, after the Gestapo, after the Burgomeisters, the spying and all the sins against human dignity which the Germans brought with them. The only bounds to liberty are the liberty of the next man and the happiness of one's country. The self-restraint of the Soviet fighting man is a guarantee that liberty will triumph.

We know the magical power of labour, and it is with good reason that we pay homage to it in our most sacred pledges. The labour of a free citizen is not a curse, is not a yoke, it is creation of a high order. It will be hard to raise cities and villages from nothingness, but the people who did not grudge their blood in defence of their native land will not grudge the sweat of their brow. In the villages that the Germans razed by fire I saw old men helping our soldiers' wives rebuild the houses. This is the pledge of our coming happiness. We know how to put egoism to shame, it has no place beside the graves of heroes.

It would seem that the idea of fraternity had gone up in smoke, but that is not so. It will arise with new force. I make bold to say this while the German hordes are still perpetrating their nefarious crimes. The Germans have proclaimed themselves the "herrensvolk." In reply the national dignity of all the peoples of the world has been roused. This should not bury the idea of fraternity but revive it, give it flesh and blood. By their crimes the Germans have excluded themselves from the family of nations. Stern

retribution awaits them. We know that it is not individuals but millions who are to blame for the atrocities committed by the German army. We shall not be sentimental with the Hitlerites nor shall we attempt to teach snakes to kiss birds. But in our sufferings we have seen the sufferings of other peoples. The Siberian understands the sorrow of Greece. The Ukrainian knows what France is experiencing, and the Byelorussian peasant feels with the Norwegian fisherman in his anguish. The idea of fraternity has become tangible, has taken on flesh. The Red Army has become an army of liberty in the eyes of all peoples. Both in enslaved France and in distant America, people speak of its brave deeds with hope. By repulsing the blows of vulture Germany it has saved not only the freedom of our country but the freedom of the world. This is what guarantees that the idea of fraternity and humanism shall triumph, and I see in the distance a world made brighter by suffering, in which good is refulgent. Our people have shown their military virtues. Now all peoples know that the Soviet Union and its army will bring peace to a tortured world. We speak of this amidst the ashes of the Ukraine and Byelorussia with anguished hearts: who of us has not lost a brother, a son, or a friend? We speak of this inspired by the knowledge that we are strong and that ours is a just cause.





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